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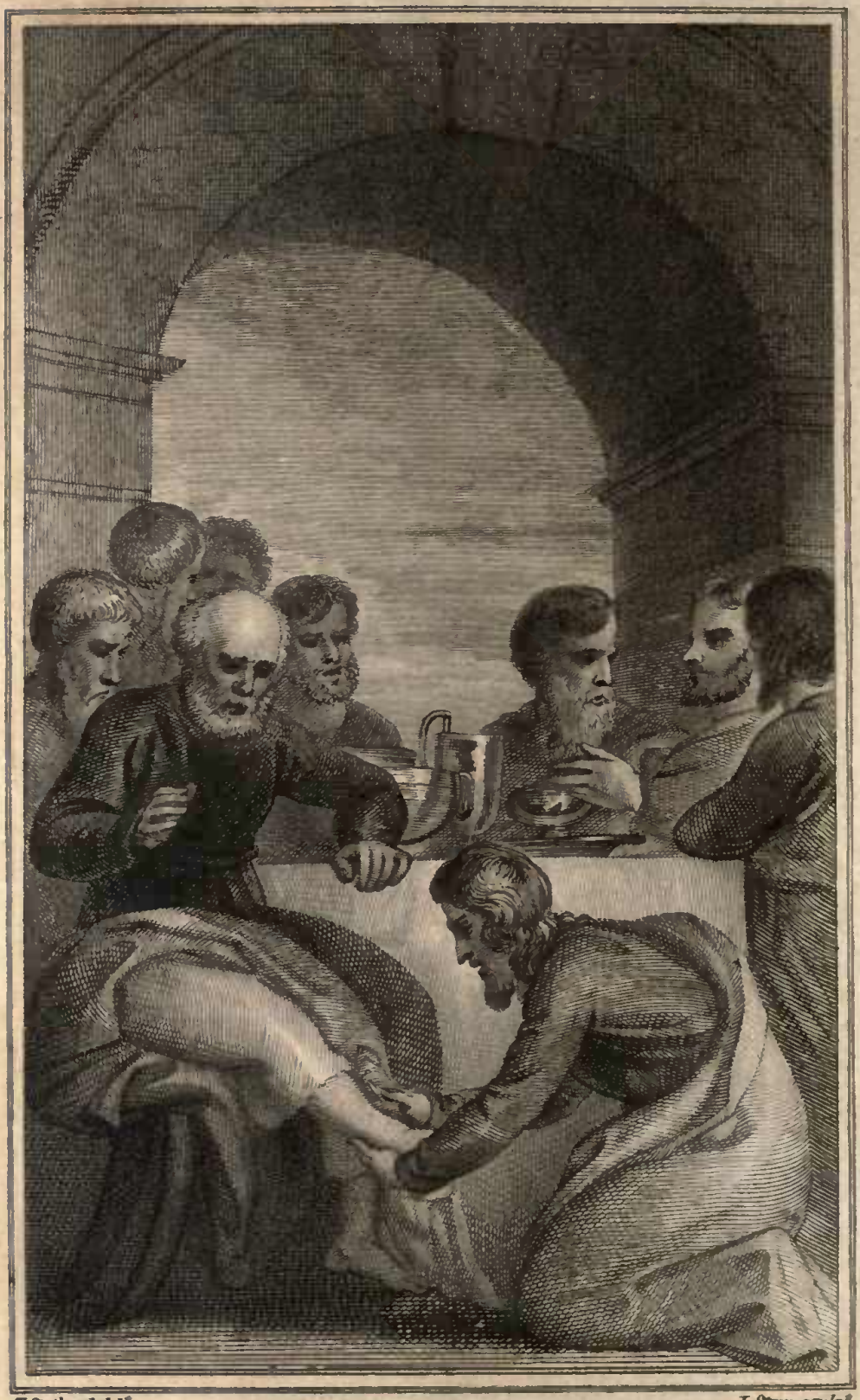

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Sermon XXXI, Page 28.

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THE

WORKS

OF

LAURENCE STERNE.

IN TEN VOLUMES COMPLETE.

CONTAINING,

I. THE LIFE AND OPINIONS OF TRISTRAM SHANDY, GENT.

II. A SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY THROUGH FRANCE AND ITALY.

III. SERMONS. —— IV. LETTERS.

WITH

A LIFE OF THE AUTHOR

WRITTEN BY HIMSELF.

VOLUME THE EIGHTH.

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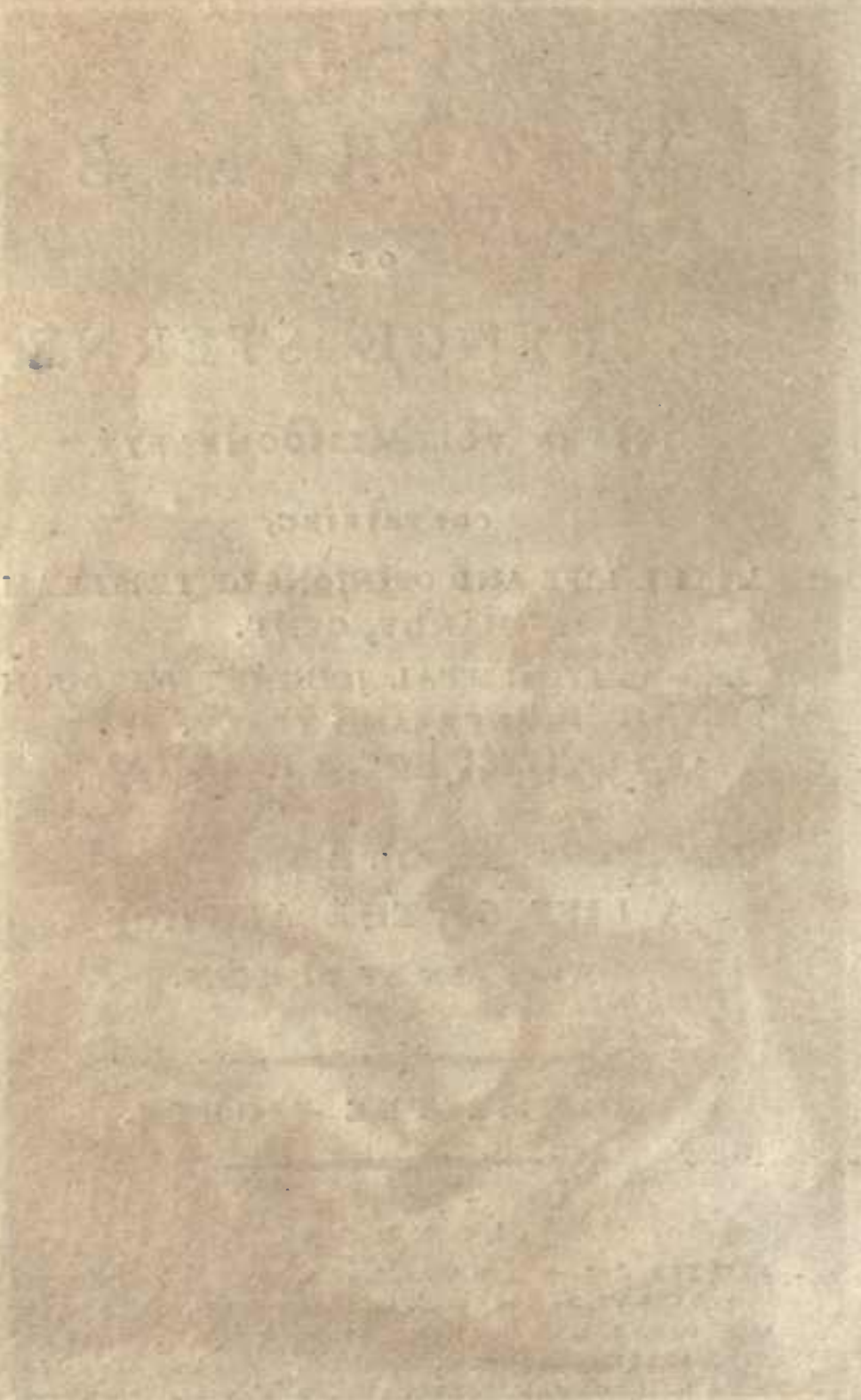

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SERMONS

BY

LAURENCE STERNE, A.M.

PREBENDARY OF YORK,

AND VICAR OF SUTTON ON THE FOREST,
AND OF STILLINGTON NEAR YORK.

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SERMON XXX.

Deſcription of the World.

2 PETER, III. 11.

Seeing, then, that all theſe things ſhall be diſſolved,—what manner of perſons ought ye to be in all holy converſation and godlineſs? looking and haſtening unto the coming of GOD.

THE ſubject upon which St. Peter is diſcourſing in this chapter, is the certainty of Chriſt's coming to judge the world;—and the words of the text are the moral application he draws from the repreſentation he gives of it,—in which, in anſwer to the cavils of the ſcoffers in the latter days, concerning the delay of his coming, he tells them, that GOD is not ſlack concerning his promiſes, as ſome men count ſlackneſs, but is long ſuffering to us ward;—*that the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens ſhall paſs away with a*

great noiſe, and the elements ſhall melt with fervent heat; the earth alſo, and the works that are therein ſhall be burnt up. —Seeing then, ſays he, all theſe things ſhall be diſſolved, what manner of perſons ought ye to be in all holy converſation and godlineſs?—The inference is unavoidable,—at leaſt in theory, however it fails in practice;—how widely theſe two differ, I intend to make the ſubject of this diſcourſe; and though it is a melancholy compariſon, to conſider, 'what manner of perſons we *really* are,' with 'what manner of perſons we *ought* to be,' yet as the knowledge of the one is at leaſt one ſtep towards the improvement in the other,—the parallel will not be thought to want its uſe.

Give me leave, therefore, in the firſt place, to recal to your obſervations, what kind of world it is we live in, and what manner of perſons we really are.

Secondly, and in oppoſition to this, I ſhall make uſe of the apoſtle's argument, and, from a brief repreſentation of the Chriſtian religion, and the obli-

gations it lays upon us, ſhew, what manner of perſons we *ought* to be in all holy converſation and godlineſs, looking for and haſtening unto the coming of the day of GOD.

Whoever takes a view of the world, will, I fear, be able to diſcern but very faint marks of this character, either upon the looks or actions of its inhabitants. —Of all the ends and purſuits we are looking for, and haſtening unto,—this would be the leaſt ſuſpected,—for, without running into that old declamatory cant upon the wickedneſs of the age,—we may ſay within the bounds of truth, —that there is as little influence from this principle which the apoſtle lays ſtreſs on, and as little ſenſe of religion,—as ſmall a ſhare of virtue (at leaſt as little of the appearance of it) as can be ſuppoſed to exiſt at all in a country where it is countenanced by the ſtate.—The degeneracy of the times has been the common complaint of many ages:—how much we exceed our forefathers in this, is known alone to that GOD who trieth

the hearts.—But this we may be allowed to urge in their favour, they ſtudied at leaſt to preſerve the appearance of virtue;—public vice was branded with public infamy, and obliged to hide its head in privacy and retirement. The ſervice of God was regularly attended, and religion not expoſed to the reproaches of the ſcorner.

How the caſe ſtands with us at preſent in each of theſe particulars, it is grievous to report, and perhaps unacceptable to religion herſelf; yet as this is a ſeaſon wherein it is fit we ſhould be told of our faults, let us for a moment impartially conſider the articles of this charge.

And firſt, concerning the great article of religion, and the influence it has at preſent upon the lives and behaviour of the preſent times;—concerning which I have ſaid, that, if we are to truſt appearances, there is as little as can well be ſuppoſed to exiſt at all in a Chriſtian country. Here I ſhall ſpare exclamations, and, avoiding all common-place railing upon the ſubject, confine myſelf

to facts, ſuch as every one who looks into the world, and makes any obſervations at all, will vouch for me.

Now whatever are the degrees of real religion amongſt us,—whatever they are, the appearances are ſtrong againſt the charitable ſide of the queſtion.—

If religion is any where to be found, one would think it would be amongſt thoſe of the higher rank in life, whoſe education, and opportunities of knowing its great importance, ſhould have brought them over to its intereſt, and rendered them as firm in the defence of it, as eminent in its example.—But if you examine the fact, you will almoſt find it a teſt of a politer education, and mark of more ſhining parts, to know nothing, and, indeed, care nothing at all about it:—or, if the ſubject happens to engage the attention of a few of the more ſprightly wits,—that it ſerves no other purpoſe but that of being made merry at, and of being reſerved as a ſtanding jeſt, to enliven diſcourſe, when converſation ſickens upon their hands.—

This is too ſore an evil not to be obſerved amongſt perſons of all ages, in what is called higher life; and ſo early does the contempt of this great concern begin to ſhew itſelf—that it is no uncommon thing to hear perſons diſputing againſt religion, and raiſing cavils againſt the Bible, at an age when ſome of them would be hard ſet to read a chapter in it. —And I may add, of thoſe whoſe ſtock in knowledge is ſomewhat larger, that for the moſt part it has ſcarce any other foundation to reſt on but the ſinking credit of traditional and ſecond-hand objections againſt revelation, which, had they leiſure to read, they would find anſwered and confuted a thouſand times over.—But this by the way.—

If we take a view of the public worſhip of Almighty God, and obſerve in what manner it is reverenced by perſons in this rank of life, whoſe duty it is to ſet an example to the poor and ignorant, we ſhall find concurring evidence upon this melancholy argument—of a general want of all outward demonſtration of a

ſenſe of our duty towards GOD, as if religion was a buſineſs fit only to employ tradeſmen and mechanics—and the ſalvation of our ſouls, a concern utterly below the conſideration of a perſon of figure and conſequence.—

I ſhall ſay nothing at preſent of the lower ranks of mankind—though they have not yet got into the faſhion of laughing at religion, and treating it with ſcorn and contempt, and I believe are too ſerious a ſet of creatures ever to come into it; yet we are not to imagine but that the contempt it is held in by thoſe whoſe examples they are apt to imitate, will in time utterly ſhake their principles, and render them, if not as prophane, at leaſt as corrupt as their betters.—When this event happens—and we begin to *feel* the effects of it in our dealings with them, thoſe who have done the miſchief will find the neceſſity at laſt of turning religious in their own defence, and, for want of a better principle, to ſet an example of piety and good morals for their own intereſt and convenience.

Thus much for the languiſhing ſtate of religion in the preſent age;—in virtue and good morals perhaps the account may ſtand higher.——

Let us inquire——

And here, I acknowledge, that an unexperienced man, who heard how loudly we all talked in behalf of virtue and moral honeſty, and how unanimous we were all in our cry againſt vicious characters of all denominations, would be apt haſtily to conclude, that the whole world was in an uproar about it—and that there was ſo general a horror and deteſtation of vice amongſt us, that mankind were all aſſociating together to hunt it out of the world, and give it no quarter.—This I own would be a natural concluſion for any one who only truſted his ears upon this ſubject.—But as matter of fact is allowed better evidence than hearſay—let us ſee in the preſent how the one caſe is contradicted by the other.——

However vehement we approve ourſelves in diſcourſe againſt vice—I believe no one is ignorant that the reception it

actually meets with is very different—the conduct and behaviour of the world is ſo oppoſite to their language, and all we hear ſo contradicted by what we ſee, as to leave little room to queſtion which ſenſe we are to truſt.——

Look, I beſeech you, amongſt thoſe whoſe higher ſtations are made a ſhelter for the liberties they take, you will ſee, that no man's character is ſo infamous, nor any woman's ſo abandoned, as not to be viſited and admitted freely into all companies, and if the party can pay for it, even publicly to be courted, careſſed, and flattered.—If this will not overthrow the credit of our virtue,—take a ſhort view of the general decay of it, from the faſhionable exceſſes of the age,—in favour of which there ſeems to be formed ſo ſtrong a party, that a man of ſobriety, temperance, and regularity, ſcarce knows how to accommodate himſelf to the ſociety he lives in,—and is oft as much at a loſs how and where to diſpoſe of himſelf;—and unleſs you ſuppoſe a mixture of conſtancy in his

temper, it is great odds but ſuch a one would be ridiculed, and laughed out of his ſcruples and his virtue at the ſame time:—to ſay nothing of occaſional rioting, chambering, and wantonneſs. —Conſider how many public markets are eſtabliſhed merely for the ſale of virtue,—where the manner of going too ſadly indicates the intention;—and the diſguiſe each is under, not only gives power ſafely to drive on the bargain, but too often tempts to carry it into execution too.—

The ſinning under diſguiſe, I own, ſeems to carry ſome appearance of a ſecret homage to virtue and decorum, and might be acknowledged as ſuch, was it not the only public inſtance the world ſeems to give of it. In other caſes, a juſt ſenſe of ſhame ſeems a matter of ſo little concern, that inſtead of any regularity of behaviour, you ſee thouſands who are tired with the very form of it, and who at length have even thrown the maſk of it aſide, as a uſeleſs piece of incumbrance.—This I

believe will need no evidence, it is too evidently ſeen in the open liberties taken every day, in defiance (not to ſay of religion, but) of decency and common good manners;—ſo that it is no uncommon thing to behold vices which heretofore were committed only in dark corners, now openly ſhew their face in broad day, and oft-times with ſuch an air of triumph, as if the party thought he was doing himſelf honour,—or that he thought the deluding an unhappy creature, and the keeping her in a ſtate of guilt, was as neceſſary a piece of grandeur as the keeping an equipage,—and did him as much credit as any other appendage of his fortune.

If we paſs on from the vices to the indecorums of the age (which is a ſofter name for vices), you will ſcarce ſee any thing, in what is called higher life, but what beſpeaks a general relaxation of all order and diſcipline, in which our opinions as well as manners ſeem to be ſet looſe from all reſtraints;—and in truth, from all ſerious reflections too:—and one may venture to ſay, that gaming

and extravagance to the utter ruin of the greateſt eſtates,—minds diſſipated with diverſions, and heads giddy with a perpetual rotation of them, are the moſt general characters to be met with; and though one would expect, that at leaſt the more ſolemn ſeaſons of the year, ſet apart for the contemplation of Chriſt's ſufferings, ſhould give ſome check and interruption to them, yet what appearance is there ever amongſt us, that it is ſo;—what one alteration does it make in the courſe of things? Is not the doctrine of mortification inſulted by the ſame luxury of entertainments at our tables?—is not the ſame order of diverſions perpetually returning, and ſcarce any thing elſe thought of?—does not the ſame levity in dreſs, as well as diſcourſe, ſhew itſelf in perſons of all ages? I ſay of all ages, for it is no ſmall aggravation of the corruption of our morals, that age, which by its authority was once able to frown youth into ſobriety and better manners, and keep them within bounds, ſeems but too often to lead the way,—and by

their unſeaſonable example give a countenance to follies and weakneſs, which youth is but too apt to run into without ſuch a recommendation.—Surely age,—which is but one remove from death, ſhould have nothing about it but what looks like a decent preparation for it.—In purer times it was the caſe,—but now,—grey hairs themſelves ſcarce ever appear, but in the high mode and flaunting garb of youth,—with heads as full of pleaſure, and clothes as ridiculouſly, and as much in the faſhion, as the perſon who wears them is uſually grown out of it:—upon which article give me leave to make a ſhort reflection; which is this, that whenever the eldeſt equal the youngeſt in the vanity of their dreſs, there is no reaſon to be given for it, but that they equal them, if not ſurpaſs them, in the vanity of their deſires.—

But this by the bye.—

Though in truth the obſervation falls in with the main intention of this diſcourſe,—which is not framed to flatter our follies, or touch them with a light

hand, but plainly to point them out; that by recalling to your mind, what manner of perſons we really are, I might better lead you to the apoſtle's inference, of what manner of perſons, ye ought to be in all holy converſation and godlineſs; looking for, and haſtening unto, the coming of the day of God.—

The apoſtle, in the concluding verſe of this argument, exhorts, that they who look for ſuch things be diligent, that they be found of him in peace, without ſpot, and blameleſs;—and one may conclude with him, that if the hopes or fears, either the reaſon or the paſſions of men are to be wrought upon at all, it muſt be from the force and influence of this awakening conſideration in the text.—"That all theſe things ſhall be diſſolved;"—that this vain and periſhable ſcene muſt change, that we who now tread the ſtage, muſt ſhortly be ſummoned away;—that we are creatures but of a day, haſtening unto the place from whence we ſhall return no more;—that whilſt we are here,—our conduct and behaviour is minute-

ly obſerved;—that there is a Being about our paths and about our beds, whoſe omniſcient eye ſpies out all our ways, and takes a faithful record of all the paſſages of our lives;—that theſe volumes ſhall be produced and opened, and men ſhall be judged out of the things that are written in them;—that without reſpect of perſons, we ſhall be made accountable for our thoughts, our words and actions, to this greateſt and beſt of Beings, before whoſe judgment-ſeat we muſt finally appear, and receive the things done in the body, whether they are good or whether they are bad.—

That to add to the terror of it,—this day of the Lord will come upon us like a thief in the night;—of that hour no one knoweth;——that we are not ſure of its being ſuſpended one day or one hour; or, what is the ſame caſe,—that we are ſtanding upon the edge of a precipice with nothing but the ſingle thread of human life to hold us up;—and that if we fall unprepared in this thoughtleſs ſtate, we are loſt, and muſt periſh for evermore.—

What manner of perſons we ought to be, upon theſe principles of our religion, St. Peter has told us, in all holy converſation and godlineſs;—and I ſhall only remind, how different a frame of mind, the looking for, and haſtening unto the coming of GOD, under ſuch a life, is, from that of ſpending our days in vanity, and our years in pleaſure.—

Give me leave, therefore, to conclude in that merciful warning, which our SAVIOUR, the Judge himſelf, hath given us at the cloſe of the ſame exhortation.—

Take heed to yourſelves, leſt at any time your hearts be over-charged with ſurfeiting and drunkenneſs, and the cares of this life;—and ſo that day come upon you unawares;—for as a ſnare ſhall it come upon all that dwell on the face of the whole earth.—Watch therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to eſcape all theſe things that ſhall come to paſs, and to ſtand before the Son of man. Which may GOD of his mercy grant, through Jeſus Chriſt. Amen.

SERMON XXXI.

St. Peter's Character.

ACTS, III. 12.

And when Peter ſaw it, he anſwered unto the people, Ye men of Iſrael, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye ſo earneſtly on us, as though by our own power or holineſs we had made this man to walk?

THESE words, as the text tells us, were ſpoke by St. Peter, on the occaſion of his miraculous cure of the lame man, who was laid at the gate of the temple, and, in the beginning of this chapter, had aſked an alms of St. Peter and St. John, as they went up together at the hour of prayer;—on whom St. Peter faſtening his eyes, as in the 4th verſe, and declaring he had no ſuch relief to give him as he expected, having neither ſilver nor gold,—but that ſuch as he had, the benefit of that divine power which he had received from his Maſter,

he would impart to him,—he commands him forthwith, in the name of Jeſus Chriſt of Nazareth, to riſe up and walk.—And he took him by the hand and lifted him up, and immediately his feet and ancle-bones received ſtrength; and he leaped up, ſtood and walked, and entered with them into the temple, leaping and praiſing GOD.—

It ſeems he had been born lame, had paſſed a whole life of deſpair, without hopes of ever being reſtored;—ſo that the immediate ſenſe of ſtrength and activity communicated to him at once, in ſo ſurpriſing and unſought-for a manner, caſt him into the tranſport of mind natural to a man ſo benefited beyond his expectation.—So that the amazing inſtance of a ſupernatural power;—the notoriety of fact, wrought at the hour of prayer;—the unexceptionableneſs of the object,—that it was no impoſture,—for they knew that it was he which ſat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple;—the unfeigned expreſſions of an enraptured heart almoſt beſide itſelf,

confirming the whole;—the man that was healed, in the 10th verſe, holding his benefactors, Peter and John, entering into the temple with them, walking and leaping, and praiſing GOD;—the great concourſe of people, drawn together by this event, in the 11th verſe, for they all ran unto them, into the porch that was called Solomon's, greatly wondering. Sure never was ſuch a fair opportunity for an ambitious mind to have eſtabliſhed a character of ſuperior goodneſs and power.—To a man ſet upon this world, who ſought his own praiſe and honour, what an invitation would it have been to have turned theſe circumſtances to ſuch a purpoſe;—to have fallen in with the paſſions of an aſtoniſhed and grateful city, prepoſſeſſed, from what had happened, ſo ſtrongly in his favour already, that little art or management was requiſite to have improved their wonder and good opinion into the higheſt reverence of his ſanctity, awe of his perſon, or whatever other belief ſhould be neceſſary to feed his pride,

or ſerve ſecret ends of glory and intereſt.—A mind not ſufficiently mortified to the world, might have been tempted here to have taken the honour due to GOD—and transferred it to himſelf.—He might—not ſo—a diſciple of Chriſt: for when Peter ſaw it,—when he ſaw the propenſity in them to be miſled on this occaſion,—he anſwered and ſaid unto the people, in the words of the text,—Ye men of Iſrael, why marvel ye at this? or why look you ſo earneſtly on us, as though by our own power and holineſs we had made this man to walk?—The GOD of Abraham, and of Iſaac, and of Jacob, the GOD of our fathers, hath glorified his ſon Jeſus.——

O holy, and bleſſed apoſtle!

How would thy meek and mortified ſpirit ſatisfy itſelf in uttering ſo humble and ſo juſt a declaration?—What an honeſt triumph wouldſt thou taſte the ſweets of,—in thus conquering thy paſſion of vain-glory,—keeping down thy pride,—diſclaiming the praiſes which ſhould have fed it, by telling the won-

dering ſpectators, It was not thy own power,—it was not thy own holineſs, which had wrought this—thou being of like paſſions and infirmities;—but that it was the power of the GOD of Abraham,—the holineſs of thy dear Lord, whom they crucified, operating by faith through thee, who waſt but an inſtrument in his hands.—If thus honeſtly declining honour, which the occaſion ſo amply invited thee to take;—if this would give more ſatisfaction to a mind like thine, than the loudeſt praiſes of a miſtaken people, what true rapture would be added to it from the reflection —that in this inſtance of ſelf-denial—thou hadſt not only done well,—but, what was ſtill a more endearing thought, that thou hadſt been able to copy the example of thy divine Maſter, who, in no action of his life, ſought ever his own praiſe, but, on the contrary, declined all poſſible occaſions of it;—and in the only public inſtance of honour which he ſuffered to be given him in his entrance into Jeruſalem,—thou didſt

remember,—it was accepted with ſuch a mixture of humility, that the prediction of the prophet was not more exactly fulfilled in the hoſannahs of the multitude, than in the meekneſs wherewith he received them, lowly and ſitting upon an aſs.—How could a diſciple fail of profiting by the example of ſo humble a maſter, whoſe whole courſe of life was a particular lecture to this virtue, and, in every inſtance of it, ſhewed plainly he came not to ſhare the pride and glories of life, or gratify the carnal expectation of ambitious followers; which, had he affected external pomp, he might have accompliſhed, by engroſſing, as he could have done by a word, all the riches of the world; and by the ſplendour of his court, and dignity of his perſon, had been greater than Solomon in all his glory, and have attracted the applauſe and admiration of the world:—this every diſciple knew was in his power;—ſo that the meanneſs of his birth,—the toils and poverty of his life,—the low offices in which he was

engaged, by preaching the goſpel to the poor—the numberleſs dangers and inconveniencies attending the execution,—were all voluntary.—This humble choice both of friends and family out of the meaneſt of the people,—amongſt whom he appeared rather as a ſervant than a maſter, coming not, as he often told them, to be miniſtered unto, but to miniſter,—and as the prophet had foretold in that mournful deſcription of him, having no form nor comelineſs, nor any beauty that we ſhould deſire him.—

How could a diſciple, you'll ſay, reflect without benefit on this amiable character, with all the other tender pathetic proofs of humility, which his memory would ſuggeſt had happened of a piece with it, in the courſe of his Maſter's life;—but particularly at the concluſion and great cataſtrophe of it,—at his crucifixion; the impreſſions of which could never be forgotten.—When a life full of ſo many engaging inſtances of humility, was crowned with the moſt endearing one of humbling himſelf to the death of the croſs,—the

death of a ſlave and a malefactor,—ſuffering himſelf to be led like a lamb to the ſlaughter,—dragged to Calvary without oppoſition or complaint, and as a ſheep before his ſhearer is dumb, opening not his mouth.—

O bleſſed Jeſus! well might a diſciple of thine learn of thee to be meek and lowly of heart, as thou exhortedſt them all, for thou waſt meek and lowly:—well might they profit, when ſuch a leſſon was ſeconded by ſuch an example!—It is not to be doubted what force this muſt have had on the actions of thoſe who were attendants and conſtant followers of our Saviour on earth;—ſaw the meekneſs of his temper in the occurrences of his life, and the amazing proof of it at his death, who, though he was able to call down legions of angels to his reſcue, or by a ſingle act of omnipotence to have deſtroyed his enemies; yet ſuppreſſed his almighty power,—neither reſented—or revenged the indignity done him, but patiently ſuffered himſelf to be numbered with the tranſgreſſors.—

It could not well be otherwiſe, but that every eye-witneſs of this muſt have been wrought upon, in ſome degree, as the apoſtle, to let the ſame mind be in him which alſo was in Chriſt Jeſus. Nor will it be diſputed how much of the honour of St. Peter's behaviour in the preſent tranſaction might be owing to the impreſſions he received on that memorable occaſion of his Lord's death, ſinking ſtill deeper, from the affecting remembrance of the many inſtances his maſter had given of this engaging virtue in the courſe of his life.—

St. Peter certainly was of a warm and ſenſible nature, as we may collect from the ſacred writings,—a temper fitteſt to receive all the advantages which ſuch impreſſions could give;—and therefore, as it is a day and place ſacred to this great apoſtle, it may not be unacceptable, if I engage the remainder of your time, in a ſhort eſſay upon his character, principally as it relates to this particular diſpoſition of heart, which is the ſubject of the diſcourſe.—

This great apoſtle was a man of diſtinction amongſt the diſciples,—and was one of ſuch virtues and qualifications, as ſeemed to have recommended him more than the advantage of his years, or knowledge.—

On his firſt admiſſion to our Saviour's acquaintance, he gave a moſt evident teſtimony that he was a man of real and tender goodneſs, when being awakened by the miraculous draught of the fiſhes, as we read in the fifth of St. Luke, and knowing the author muſt neceſſarily be from God, he fell down inſtantly at his feet,—broke out into this humble and pious reflection;—Depart from me, for I am a ſinful man, O Lord!—The cenſure, you will ſay, expreſſes him a ſinful man,—but ſo to cenſure himſelf,—with ſuch unaffected modeſty, implies more effectually than any thing elſe could,—that he was not in the common ſenſe of the word,—a ſinful, but a good man, who, like the publican in the temple, was no leſs juſtified, for a ſelf-accuſation extorted merely from the humility of

a devout heart jealous of its own imperfections.—And though the words, *depart from me*, carry in them the face of fear, —yet he who heard them, and knew the heart of the ſpeaker, found they carried in them a greater meaſure of deſire.—For Peter was not willing to be diſcharged from his new gueſt, but fearing his unfitneſs to accompany him, longed to be made more worthy of his converſation.—A meek and modeſt diſtruſt of himſelf ſeemed to have had no ſmall ſhare, at that time, in his natural temper and complexion; and though it would be greatly improved, and no doubt much better principled by the advantages on which I enlarged above, in his commerce and obſervation with his Lord and Maſter,—yet it appears to have been an early and diſtinguiſhing part of his character.—An inſtance of this, though little in itſelf, and omitted by the other evangeliſts, is preſerved by St. John, in his account of our Saviour's girding himſelf with a napkin, and waſhing the diſciples feet;

to which office not one of them is repreſented as making any oppoſition: But when he came to Simon Peter,—the Evangeliſt tells,—Peter ſaid to him,—Doſt *Thou* waſh my feet? Jeſus ſaid unto him, What I do, thou knoweſt not now, but ſhalt know hereafter.—— Peter ſaid unto him,—Thou ſhalt never waſh my feet.—Humility for a moment triumphed over his ſubmiſſion,—and he expoſtulates with him upon it, with all the earneſt and tender oppoſition which was natural to a humble heart, confounded with ſhame, that his Lord and Maſter ſhould inſiſt to do ſo mean and painful an act of ſervitude to him—

I would ſooner form a judgment of a man's temper, from his behaviour on ſuch little occurrences of life as theſe, than from the more weighed and important actions, where a man is more upon his guard;—has more preparation to diſguiſe the true diſpoſition of his heart,—and more temptation when diſguiſed to impoſe it on others.—

This management was no part of Peter's character, who, with all the real and unaffected humility which he ſhewed, was poſſeſſed of ſuch a quick ſenſibility and promptneſs of nature, which utterly unfitted him for art and premeditation;—though this particular caſt of temper had its diſadvantages, at the ſame time, as it led him to an unreſerved diſcovery of the opinions and prejudices of his heart, which he was wont to declare, and ſometimes in ſo open and unguarded a manner, as expoſed him to the ſharpneſs of a rebuke where he could leaſt bear it,—

I take notice of this, becauſe it will help us in ſome meaſure to reconcile a ſeeming contradiction in his character, which will naturally occur here, from conſidering that great and capital failing of his life, when, by a preſumptuous declaration of his own fortitude, he fell into the diſgrace of denying his Lord; in both of which he acted ſo oppoſite to the character here given, that you will aſk,—How could ſo humble a man as

you deſcribe ever have been guilty of ſo ſelf-ſufficient and unguarded a vaunt, as that, though he ſhould die with his Maſter,—yet would he not deny him?—Or whence,—that ſo ſincere and honeſt a man was not better able to perform it?—

The caſe was this—

Our Lord, before he was betrayed, had taken occaſion to admoniſh his diſciples of the peril of lapſing,—telling them, 31ſt verſe,—All ye ſhall be offended becauſe of me this night.—To which Peter anſwering, with a zeal mixed with too much confidence,—That though all ſhould be offended, yet will I *never be offended*;—to check this truſt in himſelf,—our Saviour replies, that he in particular ſhould deny him *thrice*.—But Peter looking upon this monition no farther than as it applied a reproach to his faith, and his love, and his courage;—ſtung to the heart to have them called in queſtion by his Lord,—he haſtily ſummons them all up to form his final reſolution,—Though I ſhould die with thee,

yet will I not deny thee.—The reſolve was noble and dutiful to the laſt degree, —and I make no doubt as honeſt a one —that is, both as juſt in the matter, and as ſincere in the intention, as ever was made by any of mankind;—his character not ſuffering us to imagine he made it in a braving diſſimulation:—no;—for he proved himſelf ſufficiently in earneſt by his ſubſequent behaviour in the garden, when he drew his ſword againſt a whole band of men, and thereby made it appear, that he had leſs concern for his own life, than he had for his Maſter's ſafety.—How then came his reſolution to miſcarry?—The reaſon ſeems purely this:—Peter grounded the execution of it upon too much confidence in himſelf, —doubted not but his will was in his power, whether God's grace aſſiſted him or not;—ſurely thinking, that what he had courage to reſolve ſo honeſtly, he had likewiſe ability to perform.—This was his miſtake,—and though it was a very great one,—yet it was in ſome degree a-kin to a virtue,—as it ſprung merely

from a conſciouſneſs of his integrity and truth, and too adventurous a concluſion of what they would enable him to perform, on the ſharpeſt encounters for his Maſter's ſake:—ſo that his failing in this point, was but a conſequence of this haſty and ill-conſidered reſolve;—and his Lord, to rebuke and puniſh him for it, did no other than leave him to his own ſtrength to perform it;—which, in effect, was almoſt the ſame as leaving him to the neceſſity of not performing it at all.—The great apoſtle had not conſidered, that he who precautioned him was the ſearcher of hearts,—and needed not that any ſhould teſtify of man, for he knew what was in man;—he did not remember, that his Lord had ſaid before,—Without me ye can do nothing;—that the exertions of all our faculties were under the power of his will:—he had forgot the knowledge of this needful truth, on this one unhappy juncture,—where he had ſo great a temptation to the contrary,—though he was full of the perſuaſion in every other tranſaction of

his life,—but moſt viſibly here in the text,—where he breaks forth in the warm language of a heart ſtill overflowing with remembrance of this very miſtake he had once committed;—Ye men of Iſrael, why marvel ye at this?—as though by our own power and holineſs we had wrought this?—the GOD of Abraham, of Iſaac, and of Jacob,—the GOD of our fathers, through faith in his name, hath made this man whole, whom ye ſee and know.—

This is the beſt anſwer I am able to make to this objection againſt the uniformity of the apoſtle's character which I have given:—upon which let it be added,—that was no ſuch apology capable of being made in its behalf;—that the truth and regularity of a character is not, in juſtice, to be looked upon as broken, from any one ſingle act or omiſſion which may ſeem a contradiction to it:—the beſt of men appear ſometimes to be ſtrange compounds of contradictory qualities: and, were the accidental overſights and folly of the wiſeſt man,

—the failings and imperfections of a religious man,—the haſty acts and paſſionate words of a meek man—were they to riſe up in judgment againſt them,—and an ill-natured judge be ſuffered to mark in this manner what has been done amiſs—what character ſo unexceptionable as to be able to ſtand before him? —So that, with the candid allowances which the infirmities of a man may claim when he falls through ſurpriſe more than a premeditation,—one may venture upon the whole to ſum up Peter's character in a few words.—He was a man ſenſible in his nature,—of quick paſſions, tempered with the greateſt humility and moſt unaffected poverty of ſpirit that ever met in ſuch a character. —So that in the only criminal inſtance of his life, which I have ſpoken to, you are at a loſs which to admire moſt;—the tenderneſs and ſenſibility of his ſoul, in being wrought upon to repentance by a look from Jeſus;—or the uncommon humility of it, which he teſtified thereupon, in the bitterneſs of his ſorrow for

what he had done.—He was once preſumptuous in truſting to his own ſtrength; his general and true character was that of the moſt engaging meekneſs,—diſtruſtful of himſelf and his abilities to the laſt degree.—

He denied his maſter.—But in all inſtances of his life, but that, was a man of the greateſt truth and ſincerity;—to which part of his character our Saviour has given an undeniable teſtimony, in conferring on him the ſymbolical name of Cephas, a rock, a name the moſt expreſſive of conſtancy and firmneſs.——

He was a man of great love to his maſter—and of no leſs zeal for his religion, of which, from among many, I ſhall take one inſtance out of St. John, with which I ſhall conclude this account,—Where, upon the deſertion of ſeveral other diſciples,—our Saviour puts the queſtion to the twelve,—Will ye alſo go away?—Then, ſays the text, Peter anſwered and ſaid,—Lord! whither ſhall we go? Thou haſt the words of eternal life,—and we believe, and know, that

thou art Chriſt the ſon of GOD.—Now, if we look into the goſpel, we find what our Saviour pronounced on this very confeſſion.

Bleſſed art thou, Simon Barjona, for fleſh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee,—but my Father which is in heaven. —That our Saviour had the words of eternal life,—Peter was able to deduce from principles of natural reaſon; becauſe reaſon was able to judge from the internal marks of his doctrine, that it was worthy GOD, and accommodated properly to advance human nature and human happineſs.—But for all this,—reaſon could not infallibly determine that the meſſenger of this doctrine was the Meſſias, the eternal Son of the living GOD:—to know this required an illumination;—and this illumination, I ſay, ſeems to have been vouchſafed at that inſtant as a reward,—as would have been ſufficient evidence by itſelf of the diſpoſition of his heart.——

I have now finiſhed this ſhort eſſay upon the character of St. Peter, not with

a loud panegyric upon the power of his keys, or a ranting encomium upon ſome monaſtic qualifications, with which a popiſh pulpit would ring upon ſuch an occaſion, without doing much honour to the ſaint, or good to the audience;—but have drawn it with truth and ſobriety, repreſenting it as it was, as conſiſting of virtues the moſt worthy of imitation,—and grounded, not upon apocryphal accounts and legendary inventions, the wardrobe from whence popery dreſſes out her ſaints on theſe days,—but upon matters of fact in the ſacred Scriptures, in which all Chriſtians agree.—And ſince I have mentioned *popery*, I cannot better conclude than by obſerving, how ill the ſpirit and character of that church reſembles that particular part of St. Peter's which has been made the ſubject of this diſcourſe.—Would one think that a church, which thruſts itſelf under this apoſtle's patronage, and claims her power under him, would preſume to exceed the degrees of it, which he acknowledged to poſſeſs himſelf?—But how ill

are your expectations anſwered, when, inſtead of the humble declaration in the text,—Ye men of Iſrael, marvel not at us, as if our own power and holineſs had wrought this;—you hear a language and behaviour from the Romiſh court, as oppoſite to it as inſolent words and actions can frame.—

So that inſtead of, Ye men of Iſrael, marvel not at us,—Ye men of Iſrael, *do* marvel at us,—hold us in admiration:—Approach our ſacred pontiff—(who is not only holy—but holineſs itſelf)—approach his perſon with reverence, and deem it the greateſt honour and happineſs of your lives to fall down before his chair, and be admitted to kiſs his feet.—

Think not, as if it were not our own holineſs which merits all the homage you can pay us.—It is our own holineſs,—the ſuperabundance of it, of which, having more than we know what to do with ourſelves,—from works of ſupererogation, we have transferred the ſurplus in eccleſiaſtic warehouſes, and, in pure

zeal for the good of your ſouls, have eſtabliſhed public banks of merit, ready to be drawn upon at all times.—

Think not, ye men of Iſrael, or ſay within yourſelves, that we are unprofitable ſervants;—we have no good works to ſpare, or that, if we had—we cannot make this uſe of them;—that we have no power to circulate our indulgencies,—and huckſter them out, as we do, through all the parts of Chriſtendom.—Know ye by theſe preſents, that it is our own power which does this,—the plenitude of our apoſtolic power operating with our own holineſs, that enables us to bind and looſe, as ſeems meet to us on earth;—to ſave your ſouls or deliver them up to Satan, and, as they pleaſe or diſpleaſe, to indulge whole kingdoms at once, or excommunicate them all;—binding kings in chains, and your nobles in links of iron.—

That we may never again feel the effects of ſuch language and principles,—may GOD of his mercy grant us. Amen.

SERMON XXXII.

Thirtieth of January.

EZRA, IX. 6, 7.

And I ſaid, O my God, I am aſhamed and bluſh to lift up my face to thee, my God:—for our iniquities are increaſed over our head, and our treſpaſs is grown up unto the heavens.—Since the days of our fathers have we been in a great treſpaſs unto this day.—

THERE is not, I believe, throughout all hiſtory, an inſtance of ſo ſtrange and obſtinately corrupt a people as the Jews, of whom Ezra complains;—for though, on one hand,—there never was a people that received ſo many teſtimonies of GOD's favour, to encourage them to be good,—ſo, on the other hand, there never was a people which ſo often felt the ſcourge of their iniquities, to diſhearten them from doing evil.—

ſeem'd yet neither the one or the other ſeem'd ever able to make them either the wiſer or better;—neither GOD's bleſſings, nor his corrections, could ever ſoften them;—they ſtill continued a thankleſs, unthinking people,—who profited by no leſſons, neither were to be won with mercies, nor terrified with puniſhments,—but, on every ſucceeding trial and occaſion, extremely diſpoſed againſt GOD, to go aſtray and act wickedly.

In the words of the text, the prophet's heart overflows with ſorrow, upon his reflection of this unworthy part of their character; and the manner of his application to GOD is ſo expreſſive of his humble ſenſe of it,—and there is ſomething in the words ſo full of tenderneſs and ſhame for them upon that ſcore,—as beſpeaks the moſt paternal, as well as paſtoral concern for them.—And he ſaid,—O my God! I am aſhamed,—and bluſh to lift up my face to thee, my GOD.—No doubt the holy man was confounded to look back upon

that long ſeries of ſo many of GOD's undeſerved mercies to them, of which they had made ſo bad and ungrateful a uſe: —he conſidered, that they had all the motives that could lay reſtraints either upon a conſiderate or a reaſonable people;—that GOD had not only created, upheld, and favoured them with all advantages in common with the reſt of their fellow-creatures—but had been particularly kind to them;—that when they were in the houſe of bondage, in the moſt hopeleſs condition,—he had heard their cry and took compaſſion upon their afflictions, and, by a chain of great and mighty deliverances, had ſet them free from the yoke of oppreſſion. —The prophet, no doubt, reflected at the ſame time, that, beſides this inſtance of GOD's goodneſs in firſt favouring their miraculous eſcape, a ſeries of ſucceſſes, not to be accounted for from ſecond cauſes, and the natural courſe of events, had crowned their heads in ſo remarkable a manner, as to afford an evident proof, not only of GOD's general con-

cern, but of his particular providence and attachment to them above all people:—in the wilderneſs he led them like ſheep, and kept them as the apple of his eye;—he ſuffered no man to do them wrong,—but reproved even kings for their ſake;—that when they entered into the promiſed land, no force was able to ſtand before them;—when in poſſeſſion,—no army was ever able to drive them out;—that nations greater and mightier than they, were thruſt forth from before them:—that, in a word, all nature for a time was driven backwards by the hands of GOD, to ſerve them, and that even the Sun itſelf had ſtood ſtill in the midſt of heaven, to ſecure their victories;—that when all theſe mercies were caſt away upon them,—and no principle of gratitude or intereſt could make them an obedient people,—GOD had tried by misfortunes to bring them back;—that when inſtructions, warnings, invitations, miracles, prophets, and holy guides had no effect,—he at laſt ſuffered them to reap the wages of their folly, by letting

them fall again into the ſame ſtate of bondage in Babylon, from whence he had firſt raiſed them.—Here it is that Ezra pours out his confeſſion.—It was no ſmall aggravation to Ezra's concern, to find that even this laſt trial had no good effect upon their conduct;—that all the alternatives of promiſes and threats, comforts and afflictions, inſtead of making them grow the better,—made them apparently grow the worſe: how could he intercede for them, but with ſhame and ſorrow;—and ſay, as in the text,—O my GOD, I am aſhamed, and bluſh to lift up my face to thee,—for our iniquities are increaſed over our heads,—and our treſpaſs is grown up unto the heavens;—ſince the days of our fathers have we been in a great treſpaſs unto this day.—

Thus much for the prophet's humble confeſſion to GOD for the Jews, for which he had but too juſt a foundation given by them;—and I know not how I can make a better uſe of the words, as the occaſion of the day led me to the

choice of them,—than by a ſerious application of the ſame ſad confeſſion, in regard to ourſelves.—

Our fathers, like thoſe of the Jews in Ezra's time,—no doubt have done amiſs, and greatly provoked GOD by their violence;—but if our own iniquities, like theirs, are increaſed over our heads;—if ſince the days of our fathers we have been in great treſpaſs ourſelves unto this day,—'tis fit this day we ſhould be put in mind of it;—nor can the time and occaſion be better employed, than in hearing with patience the reproofs which ſuch a parallel will lead me to give.—

It muſt be acknowledged, there is no nation which had ever ſo many extraordinary reaſons and ſupernatural motives, to become thankful and virtuous as the Jews had;—yet, at the ſame time, there is no one which has not ſufficient (and ſetting aſide at preſent the conſideration of a future ſtate as a reward for being ſo)—there is no nation under heaven, which, beſides the daily bleſſings of GOD's providence to them, but have re-

ceived ſufficient bleſſings and mercies at the hands of God to engage their beſt ſervices, and the warmeſt returns of gratitude they can pay:—there has been a time, may be, when they have been delivered from ſome grievous calamity,—from the rage of peſtilence or famine,—from the edge and fury of the ſword,—from the fate and fall of kingdoms round them;—they may have been preſerved by providential diſcoveries, from plots and deſigns againſt the well-being of their ſtates,—or by critical turns and revolutions in their favour when beginning to ſink;—by ſome ſignal interpoſition of God's providence;—they may have reſcued their liberties, and all that was dear to them, from the jaws of ſome tyrant;—or may have preſerved their religion pure and uncorrupted, when all other comforts failed them.—

If other countries have reaſon to be thankful to God for any one of theſe mercies, much more has *this* of ours, which at one time or other hath received them all;—inſomuch that our hiſtory,

for this laſt century, has ſcarce been any thing elſe but the hiſtory of our deliverances, and GOD's bleſſings,—and theſe in ſo complicated a chain, and with ſo little interruption,—as to be ſcarce ever vouchſafed to any nation or language beſides,—except the Jews;—and with regard to them, though inferior in the ſtupendous manner of their working,—yet no way ſo in the extenſive goodneſs of their effects, and the infinite benevolence which muſt have wrought them for us.—Here then let us ſtop and look back a moment, and enquire, as in the caſe of the Jews, what great effects all this has had upon our lives,—and how far worthy we have lived—of what we have received?

A ſtranger,—when he heard that this iſland had been ſo favoured by Heaven,—ſo happy in our laws and religion,—ſo flouriſhing in our trade,—ſo bleſſed in our ſituation and natural product,—and in all of them ſo often,—ſo viſibly protected by Providence,—would conclude, our gratitude and morals had kept pace with our

bleſſings;—and he would ſay,—as we are the moſt bleſſed and favoured,—that we muſt be the moſt virtuous and religious people upon the face of the earth.

Would to GOD! there was any other reaſon to incline one to ſo charitable a belief;—for, without running into any common-place declamation upon the wickedneſs of the age,—we may ſay within the bounds of truth,—that we have profited in this reſpect as little as was poſſible for the Jews;—that there is as little virtue,—and as little ſenſe of religion, at leaſt as little of the appearance of it, as can be ſuppoſed to exiſt at all, in a country where it is countenanced by the ſtate.—Our forefathers, whatever greater degrees of real virtue they were poſſeſſed of—GOD,—who ſearcheth the heart,—beſt knows;—but this is certain, in their days they had at leaſt—the form of godlineſs,—and paid this compliment to religion, as to wear at leaſt the appearance and outward garb of it.—The public ſervice of GOD was better frequented,—and in a devout, as

well as regular manner;—there was no open profaneneſs in our ſtreets to put piety to the bluſh,—or domeſtic ridicule, to make her uneaſy, and force her to withdraw.

Religion, though treated with freedom, was ſtill treated with reſpect;—the youth of both ſexes kept under greater reſtraint;—good orders and good hours were then kept up in moſt families; and, in a word, a greater ſtrictneſs and ſobriety of manners maintained throughout amongſt people of all ranks and conditions;—ſo that vice, however ſecretly it might be practiſed,—was aſhamed to be ſeen.—

But all this has inſenſibly been borne down, ever ſince the days of our forefathers treſpaſs;—when, to avoid one extreme, we began to run into another;—ſo that inſtead of any great religion amongſt us, you ſee thouſands who are tired even of the form of it, and who have at length thrown the maſk of it aſide,—as an uſeleſs incumbrance.—

But this licentiouſneſs, he would ſay, may be chiefly owing to a long courſe of proſperity, which is apt to corrupt men's minds.—God has ſince this tried you with afflictions;—you have been viſited with a long and expenſive war:—God has ſent, moreover, a peſtilence amongſt your cattle, which has cut off the ſtock from the fold,—and left no herd in the ſtalls.—Surely, he'll ſay,—two ſuch terrible ſcourges muſt have awakened the conſciences of the moſt unthinking part of you, and forced the inhabitants of your lands—from ſuch admonitions,—though they failed with the Jews, to have learnt righteouſneſs for themſelves.—

I own this is the natural effect,—and one would hope ſhould always be the natural uſe and improvement from ſuch calamities;—for we often find that numbers who, in proſperity, ſeem to forget God, do yet remember him in the day of trouble and diſtreſs.—Yet conſider this nationally,—we ſee no ſuch effect from it in fact, as one would be

led to expect from the ſpeculation:—for inſtance,—with all the devaſtation, bloodſhed, and expence which the war has occaſioned,—how many converts has it made to frugality,—to virtue, or even to ſerioufneſs itſelf?—The peſtilence amongſt our cattle,—though it has diſtreſſed and utterly undone ſo many thouſands, yet what one viſible alteration has it made in the courſe of our lives?—

And though one would imagine that the neceſſary drains of taxes for the one,—and the loſs of rents and property from the other, ſhould in ſome meaſure have withdrawn the means of gratifying our paſſions, as we have done;—yet what appearance is there amongſt us, that it is ſo?—

What one faſhionable folly or extravagance has been checked by it?—Is not there the ſame luxury and epicuriſm of entertainments at our tables?—do we not purſue with eagerneſs the ſame giddy round of trifling diverſions?—is not the infection diffuſed amongſt

people of all ranks, and all ages?—And even grey hairs, whoſe ſober example and manners ought to check the extravagant ſallies of the thoughtleſs, gay, and unexperienced,—too often totter under the ſame coſtly ornaments, and join the general riot. Where vanity, like this, governs the heart, even charity will allow us to ſuppoſe, that a conſciouſneſs of their inability to purſue greater exceſſes, is the only vexation of ſpirit.—In truth, the obſervation falls in with the main intention of the diſcourſe,—which is not framed to flatter your follies,—but plainly to point them out, and ſhew you the general corruption of manners, and want of religion;—which all men ſee,—and which the wiſe and good ſo much lament.—

But the inquirer will naturally go on, and ſay, that though this repreſentation does not anſwer his expectations, that undoubtedly we muſt have profited by theſe leſſons in other reſpects;—that though we have not approved our underſtanding in the ſight of God, by a

virtuous uſe of our misfortunes, to true wiſdom;—that we muſt have improved them, however, to political wiſdom;—ſo that he would ſay,—though the Engliſh do not appear to be a religious people,—they are at leaſt a loyal one:—They have ſo often felt the ſcourge of rebellion, and have taſted ſo much ſharp fruit from it,—as to have ſet their teeth on edge for ever.—But, good God! how would he be aſtoniſhed to find, that though we have been ſo often toſt to and fro by our own tempeſtuous humours,—that we were not yet ſick of the ſtorm;—that though we ſolemnly, on every return of this day, lament the guilt of our forefathers in ſtaining their hands in blood,—we never once think of our principles and practices, which tend the ſame way:—and though the providence of God has ſet bounds, that they do not work as much miſchief,—as in days of diſtraction and deſolation,—little reaſon have we to aſcribe the merit thereof to our own wiſdom;—ſo that, when the whole account

is ſtated betwixt us,—there ſeems nothing to prevent the application of the words in the text;—that our iniquities are encreaſed over our heads, and our treſpaſs is grown up unto the heaven.—Since the days of our fathers have we been in a great treſpaſs unto this day;—and though it is fit and becoming that we weep for them,—'tis much more ſo, that we weep for ourſelves,—that we lament our own corruptions,—and the little advantages we have made of the mercies or chaſtiſements of GOD, or from the ſins and provocations of our forefathers.—

This is the fruit we are to gather, in a day of ſuch humiliation;—and unleſs it produces that for us, by a reformation of our manners, and by turning us from the error of our ways,—the ſervice of this day is more a ſenſeleſs inſult upon the memories of our anceſtors,—than an honeſt deſign to profit by their miſtakes and misfortunes,—and to become wiſer and better from our reflections upon them.—

Till this is done, it avails little, though we pray fervently to God not to lay their ſins to our charge—whilſt we have ſo many remaining of our own. —Unleſs we are touched for ourſelves, how can we expect he ſhould hear our cry? It is the wicked corruption of a people which they are to thank for whatever natural calamities they feel;—this is the very ſtate we are in—which by diſengaging Providence from taking our part,—will always leave a people expoſed to the whole force of accidents, both from within and without:—and however ſtateſmen may diſpute about the cauſes of the growth or decay of kingdoms,—it is for this cauſe, a matter of eternal truth,—that as virtue and religion are our only recommendation to GOD,—that they are, conſequently, the only true baſis of our happineſs and proſperity on earth.—And however we may ſhelter ourſelves under diſtinctions of party,—that a wicked man is the worſt enemy the ſtate has;—and for the contrary, it will always be found, that

a virtuous man is the beſt patriot, and the beſt ſubject the king has.—And though an individual may ſay, what will my righteouſneſs profit a nation of men? —I anſwer,—if it fail of a bleſſing here, (which is not likely,) it will have one advantage—it will ſave thy own ſoul, and give thee that peace at the laſt, which this world cannot take away.—

Which GOD, of his infinite mercy, grant us all. Amen.

SERMON XXXIII.

ROMANS, II. 4.

Deſpiſeſt thou the riches of his goodneſs, and forbearance, and long ſuffering——knowing that the goodneſs of GOD leadeth thee to repentance?——

So ſays St. Paul. And

ECCLESIASTES, VIII. 11.

Becauſe ſentence againſt an evil work is not executed ſpeedily; therefore the heart of the ſons of men is fully ſet in them to do evil.——

TAKE either as you like it, you will get nothing by the bargain.——

'Tis a terrible character of the world, which Solomon is here accounting for, —that their hearts were fully ſet in them to do evil.—And the general outcry againſt the wickedneſs of the age, in every age from Solomon's down to this, ſhews but too lamentably what grounds have all along been given for the complaint.—

The diſorder and confuſion ariſing in the affairs of the world from the wickedneſs of it, being ever ſuch,—ſo evidently ſeen, ſo ſeverely felt, as naturally to induce every one who was a ſpectator or a ſufferer, to give the melancholy preference to the times he lived in; as if the corruptions of men's manners had not only exceeded the reports of former days, but the power almoſt of riſing above the pitch to which the wickedneſs of the age was arrived—How far they may have been deceived in ſuch calculations, I ſhall not inquire; —let it ſuffice, that mankind have ever been bad,—conſidering what motives they have had to be better;—and taking this for granted, inſtead of declaiming againſt it, let us ſee whether a diſcourſe may not be as ſerviceable, by endeavouring, as Solomon has here done, rather to give an account of it, and by tracing back the evils to their firſt principles, to direct ourſelves to the true remedy againſt them.—

Let it here be only premiſed,—that the wickedneſs either of the preſent or paſt times, whatever ſcandal and reproach it brings upon Chriſtians,—ought not in reaſon to reflect diſhonour upon Chriſtianity, which is ſo apparently well framed to make us good;—that there is not a greater paradox in nature,—than that ſo good a religion ſhould be no better recommended by its profeſſors.—Though this may ſeem a paradox,—'tis ſtill, I ſay, no objection, though it has often been made uſe of againſt Chriſtianity;—ſince, if the morals of men are not reformed, it is not owing to a defect in the revelation, but 'tis owing to the ſame cauſes which defeated all the uſe and intent of reaſon,—before revelation was given.—For ſetting aſide the obligation which a divine law lays upon us—whoever conſiders the ſtate and condition of human nature, and upon this view, how much ſtronger the natural motives are to virtue than to vice, would expect to find the world much better than it is, or ever has

been.—For who would ſuppoſe the generality of mankind to betray ſo much folly, as to act againſt the common intereſt of their own kind, as every man does who yields to the temptation of what is wrong?—But on the other ſide,—if men firſt look into the practice of the world, and there obſerve the ſtrange prevalency of vice, and how willing men are to defend as well as to commit it,—one would think they believed that all diſcourſes of virtue and honeſty were mere matter of ſpeculation for men to entertain ſome idle hours with;—and ſay truly, that men ſeemed univerſally to be agreed in nothing but in ſpeaking well and doing ill.—But this caſts no more diſhonour upon reaſon than it does upon revelation;—the truth of the caſe being this,—that no motives have been great enough to reſtrain thoſe from ſin who have ſecretly loved it, and only ſought pretences for the practice of it.—So that if the light of the goſpel has not left a ſufficient proviſion againſt the wickedneſs of the world,—the true an-

ſwer is, that there can be none.—'Tis ſufficient that the excellency of Chriſtianity in doctrine and precepts, and its proper tendency to make us virtuous as well as happy, is a ſtrong evidence of its divine original,—and theſe advantages it has above any inſtitution that ever was in the world:—it gives the beſt directions,—the beſt examples,—the greateſt encouragements,—the beſt helps, and the greateſt obligations to gratitude. —But as religion was not to work upon men by way of force and natural neceſſity,—but by moral perſuaſion,—which ſets good and evil before them;—ſo that, if men have power to do evil, or chuſe the good, and will abuſe it, this cannot be avoided;—not only religion, but even reaſon itſelf, muſt neceſſarily imply a freedom of choice; and all the beings in the world, which have it, were created free to ſtand or free to fall:—and therefore men that will not be wrought upon by this way of addreſs, muſt expect, and be contented, to feel the ſtroke of that rod which is prepared

for the back of fools, oft-times in this world, but undoubtedly in the next, from the hands of a righteous governor, who will finally render to every man according to his works.—

Becauſe this ſentence is not always executed ſpeedily, is the wiſe man's account of the general licentiouſneſs which prevailed through the race of mankind,—ſo early as his days; and we may allow it a place, amongſt the many other fatal cauſes of depravation in our own;—a few of which I ſhall beg leave to add to this explication of the wiſe man's; ſubjoining a few practical cautions in relation to each, as I go along.——

To begin with Solomon's account in the text,—that becauſe ſentence againſt an evil work is not executed ſpeedily, therefore the hearts of the ſons of men are fully ſet in them to do evil.—

It ſeems ſomewhat hard to underſtand the conſequence why men ſhould grow more deſperately wicked,—becauſe GOD is merciful and gives them

ſpace to repent;—this is no natural effect,—nor does the wiſe man intend to inſinuate, that the goodneſs and long ſuffering of GOD is the cauſe of the wickedneſs of man, by a direct efficacy to harden ſinners in their courſe.—But the ſcope of his diſcourſe is this, Becauſe a vicious man eſcapes at preſent, he is apt to draw falſe concluſions from it, and, from the delay of GOD's puniſhments in this life, either to conceive them at ſo remote a diſtance, or perhaps ſo uncertain, that, though he has ſome doubtful miſgivings of the future, yet he hopes, in the main, that his fears are greater than his danger;—and, from obſerving ſome of the worſt of men both live and die without any outward teſtimony of GOD's wrath,—draws from thence ſome flattering ground of encouragement for himſelf, and, with the wicked in the pſalm, ſays in his heart, Tuſh, I ſhall never be caſt down, there ſhall no harm happen unto me:—as if it was neceſſary, if GOD is to puniſh at all, that he muſt do it preſently;—which, by

the way, would rather ſeem to beſpeak the rage and fury of an incenſed party, than the determination of a wiſe and patient judge,—who reſpites puniſhment to another ſtate, declaring, for the wiſeſt reaſons, this is not the time for it to take place in,—but that he has appointed a day for it, wherein he will judge the world in righteouſneſs, and make ſuch unalterable diſtinctions betwixt the good and bad,—as to render his future judgment a full vindication of his juſtice.—

That mankind have ever made an ill uſe of this forbearance, is, and I fear will ever be, the caſe:—and St. Peter, in his deſcription of the ſcoffers in the latter days, who, he tells us, ſhall walk after their own luſts (the worſt of all characters), he gives the ſame ſad ſolution of what ſhould be their unhappy encouragement;—for that they would ſay, —Where is the promiſe [where is the threatening or declaration of, ἡ ἐπαγγελια] of his coming,—for ſince the fathers fell aſleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation;—

that is, the world goes on in the ſame uninterrupted courſe, where all things fall alike to all without any interpoſition from above,—or any outward token of divine diſpleaſure:—upon this ground, "Come ye," ſay they, as the prophet repreſents them, "I will fetch wine and we will fill ourſelves with ſtrong drink, and to-morrow ſhall be as this day, and much more abundant."——

Now, if you conſider, you will find, that all this falſe way of reaſoning doth ariſe from that groſs piece of ſelf-flattery, that ſuch do imagine GOD to be like themſelves,—that is, as cruel and revengeful as they are,—and they preſently think, if a fellow-creature offended them at the rate that ſinners are ſaid to offend GOD, and they had as much power in their hands to puniſh and torture them as he has, they would be ſure to execute it ſpeedily;—but becauſe they ſee GOD does it not, therefore they conclude, that all the talk of GOD's anger againſt vice, and his future puniſhment of it,—is mere talk, calculated for the

terror of old women and children.—Thus ſpeak they peace to their ſouls, when there is no peace;—for though a ſinner, (which the wiſe man adds by way of caution after the text,)—for though a ſinner do evil a hundred times, and his days be prolonged upon the earth,—yet ſure I know, that it ſhall be well with them that fear GOD,—but ſhall not be well with the wicked.—Upon which argument, the pſalmiſt, ſpeaking in the name of GOD,—uſes this remonſtrance to one under this fatal miſtake which has miſled thouſands;—theſe things thou didſt, and I kept ſilence:—And it ſeems this ſilence was interpreted into conſent;—for it follows,—and thou thoughteſt I was altogether ſuch a one as thyſelf;—but the pſalmiſt adds, how ill he took this at men's hands, and that they ſhould not know the difference between the forbearance of ſinners,—and his neglect of their ſins;—but I will reprove thee, and ſet them in order before thee.—Upon the whole of which, he bids them be better adviſed, and conſider, leſt while

they forget GOD, he pluck them away, and there be none to deliver them.—

Thus much for the firſt ground and cauſe which the text gives, why the hearts of the ſons of men are ſo fully ſet in them to do evil;—upon which I have only one or two cautions to add—That, in the firſt place, we frequently deceive ourſelves in the calculation that ſentence ſhall not be ſpeedily executed.—By ſad experience, vicious and debauched men find this matter to turn out very different in practice from their expectations in theory: GOD having ſo contrived the nature of things throughout the whole ſyſtem of moral duties,—that every vice, in ſome meaſure, ſhould immediately revenge itſelf upon the doer;—that falſehood, and unfair dealing, ends in diſtruſt and diſhonour;—that drunkenneſs and debauchery ſhould weaken the thread of life, and cut it ſo ſhort that the tranſgreſſor ſhall not live out half his days;—that pride ſhould be followed by mortifications;—extravagance by poverty and diſtreſs;—that the revengeful and malicious ſhould be the

greateſt tormentor of himſelf,—the perpetual diſturbance of his own mind being ſo immediate a chaſtiſement, as to verify what the wiſe man ſays upon it,—That, as the merciful man does good to his own ſoul, ſo he that is cruel troubleth his own fleſh.

In all which caſes there is a puniſhment independent of theſe, and that is, the puniſhment which a man's own mind takes upon itſelf, from the remorſe of doing what is wrong.—Prima eſt hæc ultio,—this is the firſt revenge which (whatever other puniſhments he may eſcape) is ſure to follow cloſe upon his heels, and haunts him whereſoever he goes;—for whenever a man commits a wilful bad action,—he drinks down poiſon, which, though it may work ſlowly, will work ſurely, and give him perpetual pains and heart-aches,—and if no means be uſed to expel it, will deſtroy him at laſt.—So that, notwithſtanding that final ſentence of God is not executed ſpeedily in exact weight and meaſure,—there is nevertheleſs a ſentence executed, which a man's own conſcience pronounces

againſt him;—and every wicked man, I believe, feels as regular a proceſs within his own breaſt commenced againſt himſelf, and finds himſelf as much accuſed, and as evidently and impartially condemned for what he has done amiſs, as if he had received ſentence before the moſt awful tribunal;—which judgment of conſcience, as it can be looked upon in no other light but as an anticipation of that righteous and unalterable ſentence which will be pronounced hereafter by that Being to whom he is finally to give an account of his actions—I cannot conceive the ſtate of his mind under any character than of that anxious doubtfulneſs deſcribed by the prophet,—That the wicked are like the troubled ſea, when it cannot reſt, whoſe waters caſt up mire and filth.

A ſecond caution againſt this uniform ground of falſe hope, in ſentence not being executed ſpeedily, will ariſe from this conſideration,—That in our vain calculation of this diſtant point of retribution, we generally reſpite it to the day

of judgment; and as that may be a thouſand or ten thouſand years off, it proportionably leſſens the terror.—To rectify this miſtake, we ſhould firſt conſider that the diſtance of a thing no way alters the nature of it.—2dly, That we are deceived in this diſtant proſpect, not conſidering that however far off we may fix it in this belief, that in fact it is no farther off from every man than the day of his own death.—And how certain that day is, we need not ſurely be reminded:—'Tis the certainty of the matter, and of an event which will as ſurely come to paſs, as that the Sun ſhall riſe to-morrow morning,—that ſhould enter as much into our calculations, as if it was hanging over our heads.—For though in our fond imaginations, we dream of living many years upon the earth;—how unexpectedly are we ſummoned from it?—How oft, in the ſtrength of our age, in the midſt of our projects,—when we are promiſing ourſelves the eaſe of many years?—how oft, at that very time, and in the height of

this imagination, is the decree ſealed, and the commandment gone forth to call us into another world?—

This may ſuffice for the examination of this one great cauſe of the corruption of the world;—from whence I ſhould proceed, as I purpoſed, to an inquiry after ſome other unhappy cauſes which have a ſhare in this evil,—But I have taken up ſo much more of your time in this than I firſt intended,—that I ſhall defer what I have to ſay to the next occaſion, and put an end to this diſcourſe, by an anſwer to a queſtion often aſked relatively to this argument, in prejudice of chriſtianity, which cannot be more ſeaſonably anſwered than in a diſcourſe at this time;—and that is,—Whether the chriſtian religion has done the world any ſervice in reforming the lives and morals of mankind,—which ſome, who pretend to have conſidered the preſent ſtate of vice, ſeem to doubt of?—This objection I, in ſome meaſure, have anticipated in the beginning of this diſcourſe;—and what I have to add to that

argument is this,—that as it is impoſſible to decide the point by evidence of facts, which at ſo great a diſtance cannot be brought together and compared,—it muſt be decided by reaſon, and the probability of things; upon which iſſue, one might appeal to the moſt profeſſed deiſt, and truſt him to determine,—whether the lives of thoſe who are ſet looſe from all obligations,—but thoſe of conveniency,—can be compared with thoſe who have been bleſt with the extraordinary light of a religion?—and whether ſo juſt and holy a religion as the chriſtian, which ſets reſtraints even upon our thoughts,—a religion which gives us the moſt engaging ideas of the perfections of GOD,—at the ſame time that it impreſſes the moſt awful ones of his majeſty and power;—a Being rich in mercies, but if they are abuſed, terrible in his judgments;—one conſtantly about our ſecret paths,—about our beds;—who ſpieth out all our ways,—noticeth all our actions, and is ſo pure in his nature, that he will puniſh even the wicked imaginations of

the heart, and has appointed a day wherein he will enter into this enquiry, and execute judgment according as we have deſerved.—

If either the hopes or fears, the paſſions or reaſon of men are to be wrought upon at all, ſuch principles muſt have an effect, though, I own, very far ſhort of what a thinking man ſhould expect from ſuch motives.—

No doubt, there is great room for amendment in the chriſtian world,—and the profeſſors of our holy religion may in general be ſaid to be a very corrupt and bad generation of men,—conſidering what reaſons and obligations they have to be better.—Yet ſtill I affirm, if thoſe reſtraints were leſſened,—the world would be infinitely worſe;—and therefore we cannot ſufficiently bleſs and adore the goodneſs of God, for theſe advantages brought by the coming of Chriſt—which God grant that we may live to be more deſerving of;—that, in the laſt day, when he ſhall come again to judge the world, we may riſe to life immortal. Amen.

SERMON XXXIV.

Truſt in GOD.

PSALM XXXVII. 3.

Put thou thy truſt in the Lord.

WHOEVER ſeriouſly reflects upon the ſtate and condition of man, and looks upon that dark ſide of it, which repreſents his life as open to ſo many cauſes of trouble;—when he ſees how often he eats the bread of affliction, and that he is born to it as naturally as the ſparks fly upwards;—that no rank or degrees of men are exempted from this law of our beings;—but that all, from the high cedar of Libanus to the humble ſhrub upon the wall, are ſhook in their turns by numberleſs calamities and diſtreſſes:—when one ſits down and looks upon this gloomy ſide of things, with all the ſorrowful changes and chances which

ſurround us,—at firſt ſight,—would not one wonder,—how the ſpirit of a man could bear the infirmities of his nature, and what it is that ſupports him, as it does, under the many evil accidents which he meets with in his paſſage through the valley of tears?—Without ſome certain aid within us to bear us up —ſo tender a frame as ours would be but ill fitted to encounter what generally befals it in this rugged journey:—and accordingly we find,—that we are ſo curiouſly wrought by an all-wiſe hand with a view to this,—that, in the very compoſition and texture of our nature, there is a remedy and proviſion left againſt moſt of the evils we ſuffer;—we being ſo ordered,—that the principle of ſelf-love, given us for preſervation, comes in here to our aid,—by opening a door of hope, and, in the worſt emergencies, flattering us with a belief that we ſhall extricate ourſelves, and live to ſee better days.—

This expectation,—though in fact it no way alters the nature of the croſs ac-

cidents to which we lie open, or does at all pervert the courſe of them,—yet impoſes upon the ſenſe of them, and like a ſecret ſpring in a well-contrived machine, though it cannot prevent, at leaſt it counterbalances the preſſure,—and ſo bears up this tottering, tender frame under many a violent ſhock and hard juſtling, which otherwiſe would unavoidably overwhelm it.—Without ſuch an inward reſource, from an inclination, which is natural to man, to truſt and hope for redreſs in the moſt deplorable conditions,—his ſtate in this life would be, of all creatures, the moſt miſerable —When his mind was either wrung with affliction,—or his body lay tortured with the gout or ſtone,—did he think that in this world there ſhould be no reſpite to his ſorrow;—could he believe the pains he endured would continue equally intenſe,—without remedy,—without intermiſſion;—with what deplorable lamentation would he languiſh out his day,—and how ſweet, as Job ſays, would the *clods of the valley be to him?*—But ſo ſad

a perſuaſion, whatever grounds there may be ſometimes for it, ſcarce ever gets full poſſeſſion of the mind of man, which by nature ſtruggles againſt deſpair: ſo that whatever part of us ſuffers,—the darkeſt mind inſtantly uſhers in this relief to it,—points out to hope, encourages to build, though on a ſandy foundation, and raiſes an expectation in us, that things will come to a fortunate iſſue.—And indeed it is ſomething ſurpriſing to conſider the ſtrange force of this paſſion;—what wonders it has wrought in ſupporting men's ſpirits in all ages, and under ſuch inextricable difficulties, that they have ſometimes hoped, as the apoſtle expreſſes it, even againſt hope,—againſt all likelihood;—and have looked forwards with comfort under misfortunes, when there has been little or nothing to favour ſuch an expectation.

This flattering propenſity in us, which I have here repreſented, as it is built upon one of the moſt deceitful of human paſſions—(that is),—ſelf-love, which at all times inclines us to think better of

ourſelves, and conditions, than there is ground for;—how great ſoever the relief is, which a man draws from it at preſent, it too often diſappoints in the end, leaving him to go on his way ſorrowing, — mourning, — as the prophet ſays, that his hope is loſt.—So that, after all, in our ſeverer trials, we ſtill find a neceſſity of calling in ſomething to aid this principle, and direct it ſo, that it may not wander with this uncertain expectation of what may never be accompliſhed,—but fix itſelf upon a proper object of truſt and reliance, that is able to fulfil our deſires, to hear our cry, and to help us.—The paſſion of hope, without this, though in ſtraits a man may ſupport his ſpirits for a time with a general expectation of better fortune;—yet, like a ſhip toſſed without a pilot upon a troubleſome ſea,—it may float upon the ſurface for a while, but is never,—never likely to be brought to the haven where it would be.—To accompliſh this,—reaſon and religion are called in at length, and join with nature in exhort-

ing us to hope;—but to hope in God, in whoſe hands are the iſſues of life and death,—and without whoſe knowledge and permiſſion we know that not a hair of our heads can fall to the ground.—Strenghtened with this anchor of hope, which keeps us ſtedfaſt, when the rains deſcend, and the floods come upon us,—however the ſorrows of a man are multiplied, he bears up his head, looks towards heaven with confidence, waiting for the ſalvation of God:—he then builds upon a rock againſt which the gates of hell cannot prevail.—He may be troubled, it is true, on every ſide, but ſhall not be diſtreſſed,—perplexed, yet not in deſpair:—though he walks through the valley of the ſhadow of death, even then he fears no evil; this rod and this ſtaff comfort him.

The virtue of this had been ſufficiently tried by David, and had, no doubt, been of uſe to him in the courſe of a life full of afflictions; many of which were ſo great, that he declares, that he ſhould verily have fainted under the ſenſe and

apprehenſion of them, but that he believed to ſee the goodneſs of the Lord in the land of the living.—He believed!—how could he do otherwiſe? He had all the conviction that reaſon and inſpiration could give him,—that there was a Being in whom every thing concurred which could be the proper object of truſt and confidence;—power to help,—and goodneſs always to incline him to do it.—He knew this infinite Being, though his dwelling was ſo high—that his glory was above the heavens,—yet humbled himſelf to behold the things that are done in heaven and earth:—that he was not an idle and diſtant ſpectator of what paſſed there, but that he was a preſent help in time of trouble:—that he bowed the heavens and came down to over-rule the courſe of things; delivering the poor, and him that was in miſery, from him that was too ſtrong for him; lifting the ſimple out of his diſtreſs, and guarding him by his providence, ſo that no man ſhould do him wrong:—that neither the Sun ſhould

ſmite him by day, neither the Moon by night.—Of this the Pſalmiſt had ſuch evidence from his obſervation on the life of others, with the ſtrongeſt conviction, at the ſame time, which a long life full of perſonal deliverances could give;—all which taught him the value of the leſſon in the text, from which he had received ſo much encouragement himſelf,—that he tranſmits it for the benefit of the whole race of mankind after him, to ſupport them, as it had done him, under the afflictions which befel him.

Truſt in God;—as if he had ſaid, Whoſoever thou art that ſhall hereafter fall into any ſuch ſtraits or troubles as I have experienced,—learn by my example where to ſeek for ſuccour;—truſt not in princes, nor in any child of man, for there is no help them:—the ſons of men, who are of low degree, are vanity, and are not able to help thee;—men of high degree are a lie,—too often deceive thy hopes, and will not help thee:—but thou, when thy ſoul is in heavineſs,—turn thy eyes from the earth,

and look up towards heaven, to that infinitely kind and powerful Being, who neither ſlumbereth nor ſleepeth; who is a preſent help in time of trouble:—deſpond not, and ſay within thyſelf,—why his chariot wheels ſtay ſo long?—and why he vouchſafeth thee not a ſpeedy relief?—but arm thyſelf in thy misfortunes with patience and fortitude;—truſt in GOD, who ſees all thoſe conflicts under which thou laboureſt,—who knows thy neceſſities afar off,—and puts all thy tears into his bottle;—who ſees every careful thought and penſive look,—and hears every ſigh and melancholy groan thou uttereſt.—

In all thy exigencies truſt and depend on him;—nor ever doubt but he, who heareth the cry of the fatherleſs, and defendeth the cauſe of the widow, if it is juſt, will hear thine, and either lighten thy burden, and let thee go free;—or, which is the ſame, if that ſeems not meet, by adding ſtrength to thy mind, to enable thee to ſuſtain what he has ſuffered to be laid upon thee.

Whoever recollects the particular pſalms ſaid to be compoſed by this great man, under the ſeveral diſtreſſes and croſs accidents of his life, will perceive the juſtice of this paraphraſe, which is agreeable to the ſtrain of reaſoning,—which runs through,—which is little elſe than a recollection of his own words and thoughts upon thoſe occaſions, in all which he appears to have been no leſs ſignal in his afflictions, than in his piety, and in that goodneſs of ſoul which he diſcovers under them.—I ſaid, the reflections upon his own life and providential eſcapes, which he had experienced, had had a ſhare in forming theſe religious ſentiments of truſt in his mind, which had ſo early taken root, that when he was going to fight the Philiſtine,—when he was but a youth and ſtood before Saul,—he had already learned to argue in this manner:—Let no man's heart fail him;—thy ſervant kept his father's ſheep, and there came a lion and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock, and I went out after him

and ſmote him, and delivered it out of his mouth; and when he aroſe againſt me, I caught him by the beard, and ſmote him, and ſlew him;—thy ſervant ſlew both the lion and the bear, and this uncircumciſed Philiſtine will be as one of them;—for the Lord, who delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear,—he will alſo deliver me out of his hand.—

The concluſion was natural, and the experience which every man has had of God's former loving-kindneſs and protection to him, either in dangers or diſtreſs, does unavoidably engage him to think in the ſame train.—It is obſervable that the apoſtle St. Paul, encouraging the Corinthians to bear with patience the trials incident to human nature, reminds them of the deliverances that God did formerly vouchſafe to him, and his fellow-labourers, Gaius and Ariſtarchus;—and on that ground builds a rock of encouragement, for future truſt and dependence on him.—His life had been in very great jeopardy

at Epheſus,—where he had like to have been brought out to the theatre, to be devoured by wild beaſts, and indeed had no human means to avert,—and conſequently to eſcape it;—and therefore, he tells them, that he had this advantage by it, that the more he believed he ſhould be put to death, the more he was engaged by his deliverance, never to depend on any worldly truſt, but only on GOD, who can reſcue from the greateſt extremity, even from the grave and death itſelf.—For we would not, brethren, ſays he, have you ignorant of our trouble, which came to us in Aſia, that we were preſſed out of meaſure, above our ſtrength, inſomuch that we deſpaired even of life;—but we had the ſentence of death in ourſelves that we ſhould not truſt in ourſelves, but in GOD, who raiſeth the dead, who delivered us from ſo great a death, and doth deliver, and in whom we truſt that he will ſtill deliver us.

And indeed a ſtronger argument cannot be brought for future truſt, than

the remembrance of paſt protection;—for what ground or reaſon can I have to diſtruſt the kindneſs of that perſon, who has always been my friend and benefactor?

On whom can I better rely for aſſiſtance in the day of my diſtreſs, than on him who ſtood by me in all mine affliction?—and, when I was at the brink of deſtruction, delivered me out of all my troubles? Would it not be highly ungrateful, and reflect either upon his goodneſs or his ſufficiency, to diſtruſt that providence which has always had a watchful eye over me?—and who, according to his gracious promiſes, will never leave me, nor forſake me, and who, in all my wants, in all my emergencies, has been abundantly more willing to give, than I to aſk it?—If the former and the latter rain have hitherto deſcended upon the earth in due ſeaſon, and ſeed-time and harveſt have never yet failed;—why ſhould I fear famine in the land, or doubt, but that he who feedeth the raven, and providently ca-

tereth for the ſparrow, ſhould likewiſe be my comfort?—How unlikely is it that ever he ſhould ſuffer his truth to fail?—This train of reflection, from the conſideration of paſt mercies, is ſuitable and natural to all mankind:—there being no one, who by calling to mind GOD's kindneſſes, which have been ever of old, but will ſee cauſe to apply the argument to himſelf.—

And though, in looking back upon the events which have befallen us, we are apt to attribute too much to the arm of fleſh, in recounting the more ſucceſsful parts of them; ſaying,—My wiſdom, my parts, and addreſs, extricated me from this misfortune;—my foreſight and penetration ſaved me from a ſecond;—my courage, and the mightineſs of my ſtrength, carried me through a third.—However we are accuſtomed to talk in this manner,—yet whoever cooly ſits down and reflects upon the many accidents (though very improperly called ſo) which have befallen him in the courſe of his life,—when he conſiders

the many amazing turns in his favour, —ſometimes in the moſt unpromiſing caſes,—and often brought about by the moſt unlikely cauſes; — when he remembers the particular providences which have gone along with him,—the many perſonal deliverances which have preſerved him,—the unaccountable manner in which he has been enabled to get through difficulties, which on all ſides beſet him, at one time of his life, or the ſtrength of mind he found himſelf endowed with, to encounter afflictions which fell upon him at another period:—where is the man, I ſay, who looks back with the leaſt religious ſenſe, upon what has thus happened to him, who could not give you ſufficient proofs of GOD's power, and his arm over him, and recount ſeveral caſes wherein the GOD of Jacob was his help, and the Holy One of Iſrael his redeemer?

Haſt thou ever laid upon the bed of languiſhing, or laboured under a grievous diſtemper which threatened thy life? Call to mind thy ſorrowful and pen-

ſive ſpirit at that time; and add to it, who it was that had mercy on thee, that brought thee out of darkneſs and the ſhadow of death, and made all thy bed in thy ſickneſs.——

Hath the ſcantineſs of thy condition hurried thee into great ſtraits and difficulties, and brought thee almoſt to diſtraction?—Conſider who it was that ſpread thy table in that wilderneſs of thought,—who was it made thy cup to overflow,—who added a friend of conſolation to thee, and thereby ſpake peace to thy troubled mind.—Haſt thou ever ſuſtained any conſiderable damage in thy ſtock or trade?—Bethink thyſelf who it was that gave thee a ſerene and contented mind under thoſe loſſes.—If thou haſt recovered,—conſider who it was that repaired thoſe breaches,—when thy own ſkill and endeavours failed;—call to mind whoſe providence has bleſſed them ſince,—whoſe hand it was that has ſince ſet a hedge about thee, and made all that thou haſt done to proſper.—Haſt thou

ever been wounded in thy more tender part, through the loſs of an obliging huſband?—or haſt thou been torn away from the embraces of a dear and promiſing child, by his unexpected death?—

O conſider, whether the GOD of truth did not approve himſelf a father to thee, when fatherleſs,—or a huſband to thee, when a widow,—and has either given thee a name better than of ſons and daughters, or even beyond thy hope, made thy remaining tender branches to grow up tall and beautiful, like the cedars of Libanus.

Strengthened by theſe conſiderations, ſuggeſting the ſame or like paſt deliverances, either to thyſelf,—thy friends or acquaintance,—thou wilt learn this great leſſon in the text, in all thy exigencies and diſtreſſes,—to truſt GOD; and whatever befalls thee, in the many changes and chances of this mortal life, to ſpeak comfort to thy ſoul, and to ſay in the words of Habakkuk the prophet, with which I conclude,—

Although the fig-tree ſhall not bloſſom, neither ſhall fruit be in the vines; —although the labour of the olive ſhall fail, and the fields ſhall yield no meat; —although the flock ſhall be cut off from the fold, and there ſhall be no herd in the ſtalls; yet we will rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the GOD of our ſalvation.

To whom be all honour and glory, now and for ever. Amen.

SERMON XXXV.

EXODUS, XXI. 14.

But if a man come preſumptuouſly upon his neighbour, to ſlay him with guile; thou ſhalt take him from my altar, that he may die.

As the end and happy reſult of ſociety was our mutual protection from the depredations which malice and avarice lay us open to,—ſo have the laws of GOD laid proportionable reſtraints againſt ſuch violations as would defeat us of ſuch a ſecurity.—Of all other attacks which can be made againſt us,—that of a man's life which is his all,—being the greateſt,—the offence, in GOD's diſpenſation to the Jews, was denounced as the moſt heinous,—and repreſented as moſt unpardonable.—At the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man.—Whoſo ſheddeth man's blood, by man ſhall his blood be ſhed.—Ye ſhall take no ſatisfaction for the life of a murderer;

—he ſhall ſurely be put to death.—So ye ſhall not pollute the land wherein ye are,—for blood defileth the land;—and the land cannot be cleanſed of blood that is ſhed therein, but by the blood of him that ſhed it.—For this reaſon, by the laws of all civilized nations, in all parts of the globe, it has been puniſhed with death.—

Some civilized and wiſe communities have ſo far incorporated theſe ſevere diſpenſations into their municipal laws, as to allow of no diſtinction betwixt murder and homicide,—at leaſt in the penalty:—leaving the intentions of the ſeveral parties concerned in it to that Being who knows the heart, and will adjuſt the differences of the caſe hereafter.—This falls, no doubt, heavy upon particulars—but it is urged for the benefit of the whole.—It is not the buſineſs of a preacher to enter into an examination of the grounds and reaſons for ſo ſeeming a ſeverity.—Where moſt ſevere,—they have proceeded, no doubt, from an exceſs of abhorrence of a crime,

—which is, of all others, moſt terrible and ſhocking in its own nature,—and the moſt direct attack and ſtroke at ſociety;—as the ſecurity of a man's life was the firſt protection of ſociety,—the groundwork of all the other bleſſings to be deſired from ſuch a compact.—Thefts,—oppreſſions,—exactions, and violences of that kind, cut off the branches;—this ſmote the root:—all periſhed with it:—the injury irreparable.—No after-act could make amends for it.—What recompence can he give to a man in exchange for his life?—What ſatisfaction to the widow,—the fatherleſs,—to the family,—the friends,—the relations,—cut off from his protection,—and rendered perhaps deſtitute,—perhaps miſerable for ever!—

No wonder, that, by the law of nature,—this crime was always purſued with the moſt extreme vengeance;—which made the barbarians to judge, when they ſaw St. Paul upon the point of dying a ſudden and terrifying death,—No doubt this man is a murderer;

who, though he has eſcaped the ſea, yet vengeance ſuffereth not to live.—

The cenſure there was raſh and uncharitable; but the honeſt deteſtation of the crime was uppermoſt.—They ſaw a dreadful puniſhment,—they thought;—and in ſeeing the one, they ſuſpected the other.—And the vengeance which had overtaken the holy man, was meant by them the vengeance and puniſhment of the almighty Being, whoſe providence and honour was concerned in purſuing him, from the place he had fled from, to that iſland.

The honour and authority of God is moſt evidently ſtruck at, moſt certainly, in every ſuch crime,—and therefore he would purſue it;—it being the reaſon in the ninth of Geneſis, upon which the prohibition of murder is grounded;—for in the image of God created he man;—as if to attempt the life of a man had ſomething in it peculiarly daring and audacious;—not only ſhocking as to its conſequence above all other crimes, but of perſonal violence and

indignity againſt GOD, the author of our life and death.—That it is the higheſt act of injuſtice to man, and which will admit of no compenſation,—I have ſaid.—But the depriving a man of life, does not comprehend the whole of his ſuffering; he may be cut off in an unprovided or diſordered condition, with regard to the great account betwixt himſelf and his Maker.—He may be under the power of irregular paſſions and deſires.—The beſt of men are not always upon their guard.—And I am ſure we have all reaſon to join in that affecting part of our Litany,—That amongſt other evils,—GOD would deliver us from ſudden death;—that we may have ſome fore-ſight of that period to compoſe our ſpirits,—prepare our accounts,—and put ourſelves in the beſt poſture we can to meet it; for, after we are moſt prepared,—it is a terror to human nature.—

The people of ſome nations are ſaid to have a peculiar art in poiſoning by ſlow and gradual advances.—In this caſe,—however horrid,—it ſavours of mercy with regard to our ſpiritual ſtate;

—for the ſenſible decays of nature, which a ſufferer muſt feel within him from the ſecret workings of the horrid drug—give warning, and ſhew that mercy which the bloody hand that comes upon his neighbour ſuddenly, and ſlays him with guile,—has denied him.—It may ſerve to admoniſh him of the duty of repentance, and to make his peace with God, whilſt he had time and opportunity.—The ſpeedy execution of juſtice, which, as our laws now ſtand, and which were intended for that end, —muſt ſtrike the greater terror upon that account.—Short as the interval between ſentence and death is,—it is long, compared to the caſe of the murdered. —Thou allowedſt the man no time,— ſaid the judge to a late criminal, in a moſt affecting manner; thou allowedſt him not a moment to prepare for eternity;—and to one who thinks at all,— it is, of all reflections and ſelf-accuſation, the moſt heavy and unſurmountable—That by the hand of violence, a man in a perfect ſtate of health,—whilſt he walks out in perfect ſecurity, as he

thinks, with his friends;—perhaps whilſt he is ſleeping ſoundly,—to be hurried out of the world by the aſſaſſin,—by a ſudden ſtroke,—to find himſelf at the bar of GOD's juſtice, without notice and preparation for his trial,—'tis moſt horrible!

Though he be really a good man, (and it is to be hoped GOD makes merciful allowances in ſuch caſes,)—yet it is a terrifying conſideration at the beſt;—and, as the injury is greater,—there are alſo very aggravating circumſtances relating to the perſon who commits this act.—As when it is the effect not of a raſh and ſudden paſſion, which ſometimes diſorders and confounds reaſon for a moment,—but of a deliberate and propenſe deſign or malice.—When the ſun not only goes down, but riſes upon his wrath;—when he ſleeps not—till he has ſtruck the ſtroke;—when, after he has had time and leiſure to recollect himſelf,—and conſider what he is going to do;—when, after all the checks of conſcience,—the ſtruggles of humanity,—

the recoilings of his own blood, at the thoughts of ſhedding another man's—he ſhall perſiſt ſtill,—and reſolve to do it.—Merciful God! protect us—from doing or ſuffering ſuch evils.—Bleſſed be thy name and providence, which ſeldom or ever ſuffers it to eſcape with impunity.—In vain does the guilty flatter himſelf with hopes of ſecrecy or impunity: the eye of GOD is always upon him.—Whither can he fly from his preſence!—By the immenſity of his nature, he is preſent in all places:—by the infinity of it, to all times;—by his omniſcience, to all thoughts, words, and actions of men.—By an emphatical phraſe in Scripture, the blood of the innocent is ſaid to cry to heaven from the ground for vengeance;—and it was for this reaſon, that he might be brought to juſtice,—that he was debarred the benefit of any aſylum and the cities of refuge.—For the elders of his city ſhall ſend and fetch him thence, and deliver him into the hand of the avenger of blood,—and their eye ſhould not pity him.

The text ſays,—Thou ſhalt take him from my altar that he may die.—It had been a very ancient imagination, that for men guilty of this and other horrid crimes,—a place held ſacred, as dedicated to GOD, was a refuge and protection to them from the hands of juſtice. —The law of GOD cuts the tranſgreſſor off from all deluſive hopes of this kind; —and I think the Romiſh church has very little to boaſt of in the ſanctuaries which ſhe leaves open for this and other crimes and irregularities — Sanctuaries which are often the firſt temptations to wickedneſs, and therefore bring the greater ſcandal and diſhonour to her that authoriſes their pretenſions.—

Every obſtruction of the courſe of juſtice,—is a door opened to betray ſociety, and bereave us of thoſe bleſſings which it has in view.—To ſtand up for the privileges of ſuch places, is to invite men to ſin with a bribe of impunity.— It is a ſtrange way of doing honour to GOD, to ſcreen actions which are a diſgrace to humanity.—

What Scripture and all civilized nations teach concerning the crime of taking away another man's life,—is applicable to the wickedneſs of a man's attempting to bereave himſelf of his own. —He has no more right over it,—than over that of others:—and whatever falſe gloſſes have been put upon it by men of bad heads or bad hearts,—it is at the bottom a complication of cowardice, and wickedneſs, and weakneſs;—is one of the fataleſt miſtakes deſperation can hurry a man into;—inconſiſtent with all the reaſoning and religion of the world, and irreconcileable with that patience under afflictions,—that reſignation and ſubmiſſion to the will of God in all ſtraits which is required of us.—But if our calamities are brought upon ourſelves by a man's own wickedneſs,—ſtill has he leſs to urge,—leaſt reaſon has he to renounce the protection of God—when he moſt ſtands in need of it, and of his mercy.—

But as I intend the ſubject of ſelf-murder for my diſcourſe next Sunday,—

I ſhall not anticipate what I have to ſay, but proceed to conſider ſome other caſes, in which the law relating to the life of our neighbour is tranſgreſſed in different degrees.—All which are generally ſpoken of under the ſubject of murder,—and conſidered by the beſt caſuiſts as a ſpecies of the ſame,—and in juſtice to the ſubject cannot be paſſed here.—

St. John ſays, Whoſoever hateth his brother is a murderer;—it is the firſt ſtep to this ſin;—and our Saviour, in his ſermon upon the mount, has explained in how many ſlighter and unſuſpected ways and degrees,—the command in the law,—Thou ſhalt do no murder, may be oppoſed, if not broken.—All real miſchiefs and injuries maliciouſly brought upon a man, to the ſorrow and diſturbance of his mind,—eating out the comfort of his life, and ſhortening his days, are this ſin in diſguiſe;—and the grounds of the Scripture expreſſing it with ſuch ſeverity, is,—that the beginnings of wrath and malice,—in event, often extend to ſuch great and unforeſeen effects,

as, were we foretold them,—we ſhould give ſo little credit to, as to ſay,—Is thy ſervant a dog, that he ſhould do this thing?—And though theſe beginnings do not neceſſarily produce the worſt, (God forbid they ſhould!) yet they cannot be committed without theſe evil ſeeds are firſt ſown:—As Cain's cauſeleſs anger (as Dr. Clarke obſerves) againſt his brother,—to which the apoſtle alludes—ended in taking away his life;—and the beſt inſtructors teach us, that, to avoid a ſin,—we muſt avoid the ſteps and temptations which lead to it.—

This ſhould warn us to free our minds from all tincture of avarice, and deſire after what is another man's.—It operates the ſame way,—and has terminated too oft in the ſame crime.—And it is the great excellency of the Chriſtian religion,—that it has an eye to this in the ſtreſs laid upon the firſt ſprings of evils in the heart;—rendering us accountable not only for our words,—but the thoughts themſelves,—if not checked in time,

but ſuffered to proceed further than the firſt motions of concupiſcence.

Ye have heard, therefore, ſays our Saviour, that it was ſaid by them of old time,—Thou ſhalt not kill;—but I ſay unto you,—whoſoever is angry with his brother without a cauſe, ſhall be in danger of the judgment;—and whoſoever ſhall ſay to his brother, Raca,—ſhall be in danger of the council;—but whoſoever ſhall ſay, "thou fool,"—ſhall be in danger of hell-fire. The interpretation of which I ſhall give you in the words of a great ſcripturiſt, Dr. Clarke,—and is as follows:—That the three gradations of crimes are an alluſion to the three different degrees of puniſhment, in the three courts of judicature amongſt the Jews.—And our Saviour's meaning was,—That every degree of ſin, from its firſt conception to its outrage,—every degree of malice and hatred, ſhall receive from GOD a puniſhment proportionable to the offence.—Whereas the old law, according to the Jewiſh interpretation, extended not to theſe

things at all,—forbade only murder and outward injuries,—Whoſoever ſhall ſay, "thou fool," ſhall be in danger of hell-fire.—The ſenſe of which is not that, in the ſtrict and literal acceptation, every raſh and paſſionate expreſſion ſhall be puniſhed with eternal damnation;—(for who then would be ſaved?)—but that at the exact account in the judgment of the great day, every ſecret thought and intent of the heart ſhall have its juſt eſtimation and weight in the degrees of puniſhment, which ſhall be aſſigned to every one in his final ſtate.

There is another ſpecies of this crime which is ſeldom taken notice of in diſcourſes upon the ſubject,—and yet can be reduced to no other claſs:—And that is, where the life of our neighbour is ſhortened,—and often taken away as directly as by a weapon, by the empirical ſale of noſtrums and quack medicines,—which ignorance and avarice blend.—The loud tongue of ignorance impudently promiſes much,—and the ear of the ſick is open.—And as many of theſe

pretenders deal in edge tools; too many, I fear, periſh with the miſapplication of them.—

So great are the difficulties of tracing out the hidden cauſes of the evils to which this frame of ours is ſubject,—that the moſt candid of the profeſſion have ever allowed and lamented how unavoidably they are in the dark.—So that the beſt medicines, adminiſtered with the wiſeſt heads,—ſhall often do the miſchief they were intended to prevent.—Theſe are misfortunes to which we are ſubject in this ſtate of darkneſs;—but when men without ſkill,—without education,—without knowledge either of the diſtemper, or even of what they ſell,—make merchandiſe of the miſerable,—and, from a diſhoneſt principle,—trifle with the pains of the unfortunate,—too often with their lives,—and from the mere motive of a diſhoneſt gain,—every ſuch inſtance of a perſon bereft of life by the hand of ignorance, can be conſidered in no other light than a branch of the ſame root.—It is murder in the true ſenſe;—which, though not

cognizable by our laws,—by the laws of right, every man's own mind and conſcience muſt appear equally black and deteſtable.—

In doing what is wrong,—we ſtand chargeable with all the bad conſequences which ariſe from the action, whether foreſeen or not.—And as the principal view of the empiric in thoſe caſes is not what he always pretends,—the good of the public,—but the good of himſelf,—it makes the action what it is.—

Under this head, it may not be improper to comprehend all adulterations of medicines, wilfully made worſe thro' avarice.—If a life is loſt by ſuch wilful adulterations,—and it may be affirmed, that, in many critical turns of an acute diſtemper, there is but a ſingle caſt left for the patient,—the trial and chance of a ſingle drug in his behalf; and if that has wilfully been adulterated and wilfully deſpoiled of its beſt virtues,—what will the vender anſwer?—

May GOD grant we may all anſwer well for ourſelves, that we may be finally happy. Amen.

SERMON XXXVI.

Sanctity of the Apoſtles.

MATTHEW, XI. 6.

Bleſſed is he, that ſhall not be offended in me.

THE general prejudices of the Jewiſh nation concerning the royal ſtate and condition of the Saviour, who was to come into the world,—was a ſtone of ſtumbling, and a rock of offence, to the greateſt part of that unhappy and prepoſſeſſed people, when the promiſe was actually fulfilled.—Whether it was altogether the traditions of their fathers,—or that the rapturous expreſſions of their prophets, which repreſented the Meſſiah's ſpiritual kingdom in ſuch extent of power and dominion, miſled them into it;—or that their own carnal expectations turned wilful interpreters upon them, inclining them to look for

nothing but the wealth and worldly grandeur which were to be acquired under their deliverer:—whether theſe,—or that the ſyſtem of temporal bleſſings helped to cheriſh them in this groſs and covetous expectation,—it was one of the great cauſes for their rejecting him.—"This fellow, we know not whence he is,"—was the popular cry of one part:—and they who ſeemed to know whence he was, ſcornfully turned it againſt him, by the repeated quere,—Is not this the carpenter, the ſon of Mary, the brother of James and Joſes, and of Juda and Simon?—and are not his ſiſters here with us?—And they were offended at him.—So that, though it was prepared by God to be the glory of his people Iſrael, yet the circumſtances of humility, in which he was manifeſted, were thought a ſcandal to them.—Strange!—that he who was born their king,—ſhould be born of no other virgin than Mary,—the meaneſt of their people;—(for he hath regarded the low eſtate of his handmaiden)—and of one of the pooreſt too:—for ſhe had

not a lamb to offer,—but was purified, as Moſes directed in ſuch a caſe, by the oblation of a turtle-dove;—that the Saviour of their nation, whom they expected to be uſhered amidſt them with all the enſigns and apparatus of royalty, ſhould be brought forth in a ſtable, and anſwerable to diſtreſs;—ſubjected all his life to the loweſt conditions of humanity:—that whilſt he lived, he ſhould not have a hole to put his head in, nor his corpſe in, when he died;—but his grave too muſt be the gift of charity.—Theſe were thwarting conſiderations to thoſe who waited for the redemption of Iſrael, and looked for it in no other ſhape, than the accompliſhment of thoſe golden dreams of temporal power and ſovereignty, which had filled their imaginations.—The ideas were not to be reconciled;—and ſo inſuperable an obſtacle was the prejudice on one ſide, to their belief on the other,—that it literally fell out, as Simeon prophetically declared of the Meſſiah,—that he was ſet forth for

the *fall*, as well as the riſing again, of many in Iſrael.

This, though it was the cauſe of their infidelity, was however no excuſe for it.—For whatever their miſtakes were, the miracles which were wrought in contradiction to them, brought conviction enough to leave them without excuſe;—and beſides, it was natural for them to have concluded, had their prepoſſeſſions given them leave,—that he who fed five thouſand with five loaves and two fiſhes, could not want power to be great;—and therefore needed not to appear in the condition of poverty and meanneſs, had it not, on other ſcores, been more needful to confront the pride and vanity of the world,—and to ſhew his followers what the temper of chriſtianity was, by the temper of its firſt inſtitutor;—who, though they were offered, and he could have commanded them,—deſpiſed the glories of the world;—took upon him the form of a ſervant;—and, though equal with GOD,—yet made himſelf of

no reputation,—that he might ſettle, and be the example of, ſo holy and humble a religion, and thereby convince his diſciples for ever, that neither his kingdom, nor their happineſs, were to be of this world.—Thus the Jews might have eaſily argued;—but when there was nothing but reaſon to do it with on one ſide, and ſtrong prejudices, backed with intereſt, to maintain the diſpute, upon the other,—we do not find the point is always ſo eaſily determined.—Although the purity of our Saviour's doctrine, and the mighty works he wrought in its ſupport, were demonſtratively ſtronger arguments for his divinity, than the unreſpected lowlineſs of his condition could be againſt it;—yet the prejudice continued ſtrong;—they had been accuſtomed to temporal promiſes;—ſo bribed to do their duty,—they could not endure to think of a religion that would not promiſe, as much as Moſes did, to fill their baſket, and ſet them high above all nations:—a religion whoſe appearance was not great and ſplendid,—but looked thin

and meagre;—and whoſe principles and promiſes,—like the curſes of their law,—called for ſufferings, and promiſed perſecutions.

If we take this key along with us through the New Teſtament, it will let us into the ſpirit and meaning of many of our Saviour's replies in his conferences with his diſciples, and others of the Jews;—ſo particularly in this place, Matthew, vi. when John had ſent two of his diſciples to enquire, Whether it was he that ſhould come, or that they were to look for another?—Our Saviour, with a particular eye to this prejudice, and the general ſcandal he knew had riſen againſt his religion upon this worldly account,—after a recital to the meſſengers of the many miracles he had wrought; as that—the blind received their ſight,—the lame walked,—the lepers were cleanſed,—the dead raiſed;—all which characters, with their benevolent ends, fully demonſtrated him to be the Meſſiah that was promiſed them;—he cloſes up his anſwer to them with the words of the

text,—And bleſſed is he that ſhall not be offended in me;—bleſſed is the man whoſe upright and honeſt heart will not be blinded by worldly conſiderations, or hearken to his luſts and prepoſſeſſions in a truth of this moment.—The like benediction is recorded in the 7th chapter of St. Luke, and in the ſixth of St. John;—when Peter broke out in that warm confeſſion of their belief—Lord, we believe—we are ſure that thou art Chriſt, the ſon of the living God.—The ſame benediction is uttered,—though couched in different words,—Bleſſed art thou, Simon Barjona;—for fleſh and blood has not revealed it, but my Father which is in heaven.—Fleſh and blood,—the natural workings of this carnal deſire;—the luſt and love of the world have had no hand in this conviction of thine;—but my Father, and the works which I have wrought in his name,—in vindication of this faith,—have eſtabliſhed thee in it, againſt which the gates of hell ſhall not prevail,—

This univerſal ruling principle, and almoſt invincible attachment to the intereſts and glories of the world, which we ſee firſt made ſo powerful a ſtand againſt the belief of chriſtianity,—has continued to have as ill an effect, at leaſt, upon the practice of it ever ſince;—and therefore there is no one point of wiſdom, that is of nearer importance to us,—than to purify this groſs appetite, and reſtrain it within bounds, by lowering our high conceit of the things of this life, and our concern for thoſe advantages which miſled the Jews.—To judge juſtly of the world,—we muſt ſtand at a due diſtance from it;—which will diſcover to us the vanity of its riches and honours, in ſuch true dimenſions, as will engage us to behave ourſelves towards them with moderation.—This is all that is wanting to make us wiſe and good;—that we may be left to the full influence of religion;—to which chriſtianity ſo far conduces, that it is the great bleſſing, the peculiar advantage we enjoy under

its inſtitution, that—it affords us not only the moſt excellent precepts of this kind, but alſo it ſhews us thoſe precepts confirmed by moſt excellent examples.—A heathen philoſopher may talk very elegantly about deſpiſing the world, and, like Seneca, may preſcribe very ingenious rules to teach us an art he never exerciſed himſelf:—for all the while he was writing in praiſe of poverty, he was enjoying a great eſtate, and endeavouring to make it greater.—But if ever we hope to reduce thoſe rules to practice, it muſt be by the help of religion.—If we would find men who by their lives bore witneſs to their doctrines, we muſt look for them amongſt the acts and monuments of our church,—amongſt the firſt followers of their crucified Maſter; who ſpoke with authority, becauſe they ſpoke experimentally, and took care to make their words good,—by deſpiſing the world, and voluntarily accounting all things in it loſs, that they might win Chriſt.—O holy and bleſſed apoſtles!—bleſſed were ye indeed,—for ye conferred

not with fleſh and blood,—for ye were not offended in him through any conſiderations of this world;—ye conferred not with fleſh and blood, neither with its ſnares and temptations.—Neither the pleaſures of life or the pains of death laid hold upon your faith, to make you fall from him.—Ye had your prejudices of worldly grandeur in common with the reſt of your nation;—ſaw, like them, your expectations blaſted;—but ye gave them up, as men governed by reaſon and truth.—As ye ſurrendered all your hopes in this world to your faith with fortitude,—ſo did ye meet the terrors of the world with the ſame temper.—Neither the frowns and diſcountenance of the civil powers,—neither tribulation, or diſtreſs, or perſecution,—or cold,—or nakedneſs,—or famine,—or the ſword, could ſeparate you from the love of Chriſt.—Ye took up your croſſes cheerfully, and followed him;—followed the ſame rugged way—trod the wine-preſs after him;—voluntarily ſubmitting yourſelves to poverty,—to puniſhment,—to

the ſcorn and the reproaches of the world, which ye knew were to be the portion of all of you who engaged in preaching a myſtery ſo ſpoken againſt by the world;—ſo unpalatable to all its paſſions and pleaſures,—and ſo irreconcilable to the pride of human reaſon.—So that ye were, as one of ye expreſſed, and all of ye experimentally found, though ye were made as the filth of the world, and the off-ſcouring of all things, upon this account;—yet ye went on as zealouſly as ye ſet out.—Ye were not offended, nor aſhamed of the goſpel of Chriſt;—wherefore ſhould ye?—The impoſtor and hypocrite might have been aſhamed;—the guilty would have found cauſe for it;—ye had no cauſe,—though ye had temptation.—Ye preached *but what ye knew*, and your honeſt and upright hearts gave evidence,—the ſtrongeſt,—to the truth of it;—for ye left all,—ye ſuffered all,—ye gave all that your ſincerity had left you to give. Ye gave your lives at laſt as pledges and confirmations of your faith and warmeſt affec-

tion for your Lord.—Holy and bleſſed men!—ye gave all,—when, alas! our cold and frozen affection will part with nothing for his ſake, not even with our vices and follies, which are worſe than nothing;—for they are vanity, and miſery, and death.—

The ſtate of chriſtianity calls not now for ſuch evidences, as the apoſtles gave of their attachment to it.—We have, literally ſpeaking, neither houſes nor lands, nor poſſeſſions to forſake;—we have neither wives or children, or brethren or ſiſters, to be torn from;—no rational pleaſure—or natural endearments to give up.—We have nothing to part with,—but what is not our intereſt to keep,—our luſts and paſſions.—We have nothing to do for Chriſt's ſake—but what is moſt for our own;—that is,—to be temperate, and chaſte, and juſt,—and peaceable,—and charitable,—and kind to one another.—So that if man could ſuppoſe himſelf in a capacity even of capitulating with God, concerning the terms upon which he

would ſubmit to his government;—and to chuſe the laws he would be bound to obſerve in teſtimony of his faith;—it were impoſſible for him to make any propoſals which, upon all accounts, ſhould be more advantageous to his intereſts, than thoſe very conditions to which we are already obliged; that is, to deny ourſelves ungodlineſs, to live ſoberly and righteouſly in this preſent life, and lay ſuch reſtraints upon our appetites as are for the honour of human nature,—the improvement of our happineſs,—our health,—our peace,—our reputation and ſafety.—When one conſiders this repreſentation of the temporal inducements of chriſtianity,—and compares it with the difficulties and diſcouragements which they encountered who firſt made profeſſion of a perſecuted and hated religion;—at the ſame time that it raiſes the idea of the fortitude and ſanctity of theſe holy men, of whom the world is not worthy,—it ſadly diminiſhes that of ourſelves,—which, though it has all the bleſſings of this

life apparently on its ſide to ſupport it —yet can ſcarce be kept alive;—and if we may form a judgment from the little ſtock of religion which is left,—ſhould God ever exact the ſame trials,—unleſs we greatly alter for the better,—or there ſhould prove ſome ſecret charm in perſecution, which we know not of.—It is much to be doubted, if the Son of man ſhould make this proof,—of this generation,—whether there would be found faith upon the earth.

As this argument may convince us, —ſo let it ſhame us into virtue,—that the admirable examples of thoſe holy men may not be left us, or commemorated by us to no end;—but rather that they may anſwer the pious purpoſe of their inſtitution,—to conform our lives to theirs,—that with them we may be partakers of a glorious inheritance, through Jeſus Chriſt our Lord. Amen.

SERMON XXXVII.

Penances.

1 JOHN, v. 3.

And his commandments are not grievous.

No,—they are not grievous, my dear auditors.—Amongſt the many prejudices which at one time or other have been conceived againſt our holy religion, there is ſcarce any one which has done more diſhonour to chriſtianity, or which has been more oppoſite to the ſpirit of the goſpel, than this, in expreſs contradiction to the words of the text, "That the commandments of GOD *are* grievous."—That the way which leads to life is not only ſtrait, for that our Saviour tells us, and that with much tribulation we ſhall ſeek it;—but that chriſtians are bound to make the worſt of it, and tread it barefoot upon thorns

and briers,—if ever they expect to arrive happily at their journey's end.—And in courſe,—during this diſaſtrous pilgrimage, it is our duty ſo to renounce the world, and abſtract ourſelves from it, as neither to interfere with its intereſts, or taſte any of the pleaſures, or any of the enjoyments of this life.—

Nor has this been confined merely to ſpeculation, but has frequently been extended to practice, as is plain, not only from the lives of many legendary ſaints and hermits,—whoſe chief commendation ſeems to have been, "That they fled unnaturally from all commerce with their fellow-creatures, and then mortified, and piouſly—half ſtarved themſelves to death;"—but likewiſe from the many auſtere and fantaſtic orders which we ſee in the Romiſh church, which have all owed their origin and eſtabliſhment to the ſame idle and extravagant opinion.

Nor is it to be doubted, but the affectation of ſomething like it in our Methodiſts, when they deſcant upon the

neceſſity of alienating themſelves from the world, and ſelling all that they have, —is not to be aſcribed to the ſame miſtaken enthuſiaſtic principle, which would caſt ſo black a ſhade upon religion, as if the kind Author of it had created us on purpoſe to go mourning, all our lives long, in ſack-cloth and aſhes,— and ſent us into the world, as ſo many ſaint-errants, in queſt of adventures full of ſorrow and affliction.

Strange force of enthuſiaſm!—and yet not altogether unaccountable.—For what opinion was there ever ſo odd, or action ſo extravagant, which has not, at one time or other, been produced by ignorance, — conceit, — melancholy? — a mixture of devotion, with an ill concurrence of air and diet, operating together in the ſame perſon.—When the minds of men happen to be thus unfortunately prepared, whatever groundleſs doctrine riſes up, and ſettles itſelf ſtrongly upon their fancies, has generally the ill-luck to be interpreted as an illumination from the ſpirit of GOD;—and

whatever ſtrange action they find in themſelves a ſtrong inclination to do,—that impulſe is concluded to be a call from heaven; and conſequently,—that they cannot err in executing it.—

If this, or ſome ſuch account, was not to be admitted, how is it poſſible to be conceived that chriſtianity, which breathed out nothing but peace and comfort to mankind, which profeſſedly took off the ſeverities of the Jewiſh law, and was given us in the ſpirit of meekneſs, to eaſe our ſhoulders of a burden which was too heavy for us:—that this religion, ſo kindly calculated for the eaſe and tranquillity of man, which enjoins nothing but what is ſuitable to his nature, ſhould be ſo miſunderſtood:—or that it ſhould ever be ſuppoſed,—that he who is infinitely happy, could envy us our enjoyments;—or that a Being infinitely kind, would grudge a mournful paſſenger a little reſt and refreſhment, to ſupport his ſpirits, through a weary pilgrimage;—or that he ſhould call him to an account here-

after, becauſe, in his way, he had haſtily ſnatched at ſome fugacious and innocent pleaſures, till he was ſuffered to take up his final repoſe. — This is no improbable account, and the many invitations we find in Scripture to a grateful enjoyment of the bleſſings and advantages of life, make it evident.— The apoſtle tells us in the text,—That GOD's commandments are not grievous. —He has pleaſure in the proſperity of his people, and wills not that they ſhould turn tyrants and executioners upon their minds or bodies, and inflict pains and penalties on them to no end or purpoſe: — That he has propoſed peace and plenty, joy and victory, as the encouragement and portion of his ſervants; thereby inſtructing us,—that our virtue is not neceſſarily endangered by the fruition of outward things;—but that temporal bleſſings and advantages, inſtead of extinguiſhing, more naturally kindle our love and gratitude to GOD, before whom it is no way inconſiſtent both to worſhip and rejoice.

If this was not ſo, why, you'll ſay, does GOD ſeem to have made ſuch proviſion for our happineſs?—Why has he given us ſo many powers and faculties for enjoyment, and adapted ſo many objects to gratify and entertain them?—Some of which he has created ſo fair,—with ſuch wonderful beauty, and has formed them ſo exquiſitely for this end,—that they have power, for a time, to charm away the ſenſe of pain,—to cheer up the dejected heart under poverty and ſickneſs, and make it go and remember its miſeries no more.—Can all this, you'll ſay, be reconciled to GOD's wiſdom, which does nothing in vain;—or can it be accounted for on any other ſuppoſition, but that the Author of our being, who has given us all things richly to enjoy, wills us a comfortable exiſtence even *here*, and ſeems moreover ſo evidently to have ordered things with a view to this, that the ways which lead to our future happineſs, when rightly underſtood, he has made to be ways of pleaſantneſs, and all her paths peace?

From this repreſentation of things we are led to this demonſtrative truth, then, that GOD never intended to debar man of pleaſures, under certain limitations.

Travellers, on a buſineſs of the laſt and moſt important concern, may be allowed to pleaſe their eyes with the natural and artificial beauties of the country they are paſſing through, without reproach of forgetting the main errand they were ſent upon;—and if they are not led out of their road by variety of proſpects, edifices, and ruins, would it not be a ſenſeleſs piece of ſeverity to ſhut their eyes againſt ſuch gratifications? —*For who has required ſuch ſervice at their hands?*

The humouring of certain appetites, where morality is not concerned, ſeems to be the means by which the Author of nature intended to ſweeten this journey of life,—and bear us up under the many ſhocks and hard joſtlings, which we are ſure to meet with in our way. —And a man might, with as much

reaſon, muffle up himſelf againſt ſunſhine and fair weather,—and at other times expoſe himſelf naked to the inclemencies of cold and rain, as debar himſelf of the innocent delights of his nature, for affected reſerve and melancholy.

It is true, on the other hand, our paſſions are apt to grow upon us by indulgence, and become exorbitant, if they are not kept under exact diſcipline, that by way of caution and prevention, 'twere better, at certain times, to affect ſome degree of needleſs reſerve, than hazard any ill conſequences from the other extreme.

But when almoſt the whole of religion is made to conſiſt in the pious fooleries of penances and ſufferings, as is practiſed in the church of Rome (did no other evil attend it), yet, ſince it is putting religion upon a wrong ſcent, placing it more in theſe than in inward purity and integrity of heart, one cannot guard too much againſt this, as well as all other ſuch abuſes of reli-

gion, as make it to conſiſt in ſomething which it ought not.—How ſuch mockery became a part of religion at firſt, or upon what motives they were imagined to be ſervices acceptable to GOD, is hard to give a better account of than what was hinted above;—namely,—that men of melancholy and moroſe tempers, conceiving the Deity to be like themſelves, a gloomy, diſcontented, and ſorrowful being,—believed he delighted, as they did, in ſplenetic and mortifying actions, and therefore made their religious worſhip to conſiſt of chimeras as wild and barbarous as their own dreams and vapours.

What ignorance and enthuſiaſm at firſt introduced,—now tyranny and impoſture continue to ſupport.—So that the political improvement of theſe deluſions to the purpoſes of wealth and power, is made one of the ſtrongeſt pillars which upholds the Romiſh religion;—which, with all its pretences to a more ſtrict mortification and ſanctity, —when you examine it minutely, is

little elſe than a mere pecuniary contrivance.—And the trueſt definition you can give of popery—is,—that it is a ſyſtem put together and contrived to operate upon men's weakneſſes and paſſions,—and thereby to pick their pockets,—and leave them in a fit condition for its arbitrary deſigns.

And indeed that church has not been wanting in gratitude for the good offices of this kind, which the doctrine of penances has done them; for, in conſideration of its ſervices,—they have raiſed it above the level of moral duties,—and have at length complimented it into the number of their ſacraments, and made it a neceſſary point of ſalvation.

By theſe, and other tenets, no leſs politic and inquiſitional,—popery has found out the art of making men miſerable in ſpite of their ſenſes, and the plenty with which GOD has bleſſed them.

So that in many countries where popery reigns,—but eſpecially in that part

of Italy where ſhe has raiſed her throne, —though, by the happineſs of its ſoil and climate, it is capable of producing as great variety and abundance as any country upon earth;—yet ſo ſucceſsful have its ſpiritual directors been in the management and retail of theſe bleſſings,—that they have found means to allay, if not entirely to defeat, them all, by one pretence or other.—Some bitterneſs is officiouſly ſqueezed into every man's cup for his ſoul's health, till, at length, the whole intention of nature and providence is deſtroyed.—It is not ſurpriſing, that where ſuch unnatural ſeverities are practiſed and heightened by other hardſhips,—the moſt fruitful land ſhould be barren, and wear a face of poverty and deſolation;—or that many thouſands, as have been obſerved, ſhould fly from the rigours of ſuch a government, and ſeek ſhelter rather amongſt rocks and deſerts, than lie at the mercy of ſo many unreaſonable taſk-makers, under whom they can hope for no other reward of their induſ-

try,—but rigorous ſlavery, made ſtill worſe by the tortures of unneceſſary mortifications.—*I ſay unneceſſary*,—becauſe where there *is* a virtuous and good end propoſed from any ſober inſtances of ſelf-denial and mortification,—God forbid we ſhould call them unneceſſary, or that we ſhould diſpute againſt a thing—from the abuſe to which it has been put;—and, therefore, what is ſaid in general upon this head, will be underſtood to reach no farther than where the practice is become a mixture of fraud and tyranny, but will no ways be interpreted to extend to thoſe ſelf-denials which the diſcipline of our holy church directs at this ſolemn ſeaſon; which have been introduced by reaſon and good ſenſe at firſt, and have ſince been applied to ſerve no purpoſes,—but thoſe of religion:—theſe, by reſtraining our appetites for a while, and withdrawing our thoughts from groſſer objects,—do, by a mechanical effect, diſpoſe us for cool and ſober reflections, incline us to turn our eyes inwards up-

on ourſelves, and conſider what we are, —and what we have been doing;—for what intent we were ſent into the world, and what kind of characters we were deſigned to act in it.

It is neceſſary that the mind of man, at ſome certain periods, ſhould be prepared to enter into this account; and without ſome ſuch diſcipline, to check the inſolence of unreſtrained appetites, and call home the conſcience,—the ſoul of man, capable as it is of brightneſs and perfection, would ſink down to the loweſt depths of darkneſs and brutality. —However true this is,—there ſtill appears no obligation to renounce the innocent delights of our beings, or to affect a ſullen diſtaſte againſt them.— Nor, in truth,—can even the ſuppoſition of it be well admitted: —for pleaſures ariſing from the free and natural exerciſe of the faculties of the mind and body, to talk them down, is like talking againſt the frame and mechaniſm of human nature, and would be no leſs ſenſeleſs than the diſputing

againſt the burning of fire, or falling downwards of a ſtone.—Beſides this,—man is ſo contrived, that he ſtands in need of frequent repairs;—both mind and body are apt to ſink and grow unactive under long and cloſe attention;—and, therefore, muſt be reſtored by proper recruits.—Some part of our time may doubtleſs innocently and lawfully be employed in actions merely diverting;—and whenever ſuch indulgencies become criminal, it is ſeldom the nature of the actions themſelves,—but the exceſs which makes them ſo.

But ſome one may here aſk,—By what rule are we to judge of exceſs in theſe caſes?—If the enjoyment of the ſame ſort of pleaſures may be either innocent or guilty, according to the uſe and abuſe of them,—how ſhall we be certified where the boundaries lie?—or be ſpeculative enough to know how far we may go with ſafety?—I anſwer, there are very few who are not caſuiſts enough to make a right judgment in this point.—For ſince one principal reaſon, why

God may be ſuppoſed to allow pleaſure in this world, ſeems to be for the refreſhment and recruit of our ſouls and bodies, which, like clocks, muſt be wound up at certain intervals,—every man underſtands ſo much of the frame and mechaniſm of himſelf, to know how and when to unbend himſelf with ſuch relaxations as are neceſſary to regain his natural vigour and cheerfulneſs, without which it is impoſſible he ſhould either be in a diſpoſition or capacity to diſcharge the ſeveral duties of his life. —Here then the partition becomes viſible.

Whenever we pay this tribute to our appetites, any further than is ſufficient for the purpoſes for which it was firſt granted,—the action proportionably loſes ſome ſhare of its innocence.—The ſurpluſage of what is unneceſſarily ſpent on ſuch occaſions, is ſo much of the little portion of our time negligently ſquandered, which, in prudence, we ſhould apply better; becauſe it was allotted us for more important uſes, and

a different account will be required of it at our hands hereafter.

For this reaſon, does it not evidently follow,—that many actions and purſuits, which are irreproachable in their own natures, may be rendered blameable and vicious, from this ſingle conſideration, "That they have made us waſteful of the moments of this ſhort and uncertain fragment of life, which ſhould be almoſt one of our laſt prodigalities, ſince of them all, the leaſt retrieveable." —Yet how often is diverſion, inſtead of amuſement and relaxation, made the art and buſineſs of life itſelf? —Look round,—what policy and contrivance is every day put in practice, for pre-engaging every day in the week, and parcelling out every hour of the day for one idleneſs or another,—for doing nothing,—or ſomething worſe than nothing;—and that with ſo much ingenuity, as ſcarce to leave a minute upon their hands to reproach them.—Though we all complain of the ſhortneſs of life,—yet how many people

ſeem quite over-ſtocked with the days and hours of it, and are continually ſending out into the highways and ſtreets of the city for gueſts to come and take it off their hands.—If ſome of the more diſtreſsful objects of this kind were to ſit down and write a bill of their time, though partial as that of the unjuſt ſteward,—when they found in reality, that the whole ſum of it, for many years, amounted to little more than this,—that they had roſe up to eat, —to drink, —to play, —and had laid down again, merely becauſe they were fit for nothing elſe: —when they looked back and beheld this fair ſpace, capable of ſuch heavenly improvements,—all ſcrawled over and defaced with a ſucceſſion of ſo many unmeaning cyphers, —good GOD!—how would they be aſhamed and confounded at the account!

With what reflections will they be able to ſupport themſelves in the decline of a life ſo miſerably caſt away, —ſhould it happen, as it ſometimes

does,—that they have ſtood idle even unto the eleventh hour?—We have not always power, and are not always in a temper, to impoſe upon ourſelves.—When the edge of appetite is worn down, and the ſpirits of youthful days are cooled, which hurried us on in a circle of pleaſure and impertinence,—then reaſon and reflection will have the weight which they deſerve;—afflictions, or the bed of ſickneſs, will ſupply the place of conſcience;—and if they ſhould fail,—old age will overtake us at laſt,——and ſhew us the paſt purſuits of life,—and force us to look upon them in their true point of view.—If there is any thing more to caſt a cloud upon ſo melancholy a proſpect as this ſhews us,—it is ſurely the difficulty and hazard of having all the work of the day to perform in the laſt hour;—of making an atonement to God, when we have no ſacrifice to offer him, but the dregs and infirmities of thoſe days, when we could have no pleaſure in them.

How far GOD may be pleaſed to accept ſuch late and imperfect ſervices, is beyond the intention of this diſcourſe.—Whatever ſtreſs ſome may lay upon it,—a death-bed repentance is but a weak and ſlender plank to truſt our all upon.—Such as it is;—to that,—and GOD's infinite mercies, we commit them, who will not employ that time and opportunity he has given to provide a better ſecurity.

That we may all make a right uſe of the time allotted us,—GOD grant through the merits of his Son Jeſus Chriſt. Amen.

SERMON XXXVIII.

On Enthuſiaſm.

ST. JOHN, XV. 5.

——For without me, ye can do nothing.

OUR Saviour, in the former part of the verſe, having told his diſciples, —That he was the vine, and that they were only branches; — intimating, in what a degree their good fruits, as well as the ſucceſs of all their endeavours, were to depend upon his communications with them;—he cloſes the illuſtration with the inference from it, in the words of the text,—For without me, ye can do thing.—In the 11th chapter to the Romans, where the manner is explained in which a chriſtian ſtands by faith,—there is a like illuſtration made uſe of, and probably with an eye to this,—where St. Paul inſtructs us,—that a good man

ſtands as the branch of a wild olive does when it is grafted into a good olive-tree; —and that is,—it flouriſhes not through its own virtue, but in virtue of the root, —and ſuch a root as is naturally not its own.

It is very remarkable in that paſſage, —that the Apoſtle calls a bad man a wild olive-*tree*;—not barely a branch (as in the other caſe), but a tree, which, having a root of its own, ſupports itſelf, and ſtands in its own ſtrength, and brings forth its own fruit.—And ſo does every bad man in reſpect of the wild and ſour fruit of a vicious and corrupt heart. —According to the reſemblance,—if the apoſtle intended it,—he is a tree,—has a root of his own,—and fruitfulneſs, ſuch as it is, with a power to bring it forth without help. But in reſpect of religion, and the moral improvements of virtue and goodneſs,—the apoſtle calls us, and reaſon tells us, we are no more than a branch; and all our fruitfulneſs, and all our ſupport,—depend ſo much upon the influence and communications

of GOD,—that without him we can do nothing,—as our Saviour declares in the text.—There is ſcarce any point in our religion wherein men have run into ſuch violent extremes as in the ſenſes given to this, and ſuch-like declarations in Scripture,—of our ſufficiency being of GOD;—ſome underſtanding them ſo, as to leave no meaning at all in them;—others,—too much:—the one interpreting the gifts and influences of the ſpirit, ſo as to deſtroy the truth of all ſuch promiſes and declarations in the goſpel;—the other carrying their notions of them ſo high, as to deſtroy the reaſon of the goſpel itſelf,—and render the chriſtian religion, which conſiſts of ſober and conſiſtent doctrines,—the moſt intoxicated,—the moſt wild and unintelligible inſtitution that ever was in the world.

This being premiſed, I know not how I can more ſeaſonably engage your attention this day, than by a ſhort examination of each of theſe errors;—in doing which, as I ſhall take ſome pains to reduce both the extremes of them to

reaſon,—it will neceſſarily lead me, at the ſame time, to mark the ſafe and true doctrine of our church, concerning the promiſed influences and operations of the ſpirit of GOD upon our hearts;—which, however depreciated through the firſt miſtake,—or boaſted of beyond meaſure through the ſecond,—muſt nevertheleſs be ſo limited and underſtood,—as, on one hand, to make the goſpel of Chriſt conſiſtent with itſelf,—and, on the other, to make it conſiſtent with reaſon and common ſenſe.

If we conſider the many expreſs declarations, wherein our Saviour tells his followers, before his crucifixion,—That GOD would ſend his ſpirit the Comforter amongſt them, to ſupply his place in their hearts;—and, as in the text,—that without him, they could do nothing:—if we conceive them as ſpoken to his diſciples, with an immediate view to the emergencies they were under, from their *natural* incapacities of finiſhing the great work he had left them, and building upon that large foundation he had laid,—

without ſome extraordinary help and guidance to carry them through,—no one can diſpute that evidence and confirmation which was after given of its truth;—as our Lord's diſciples were illiterate men, conſequently unſkilled in the arts and acquired ways of perſuaſion.—Unleſs this want had been ſupplied,—the firſt obſtacle to their labours muſt have diſcouraged and put an end to them for ever.—As they had no language but their own, without the gift of tongues they could not have preached the goſpel except in Judæa;—and as they had no authority of their own,—without the ſupernatural one of ſigns and wonders,—they could not vouch for the truth of it beyond the limits where it was firſt tranſacted.—In this work, doubtleſs, all their ſufficiency and power of acting was immediately from God;—his holy ſpirit, as he had promiſed them, ſo it gave them a mouth and wiſdom which all their adverſaries were not able to gainſay or reſiſt.—So that without him,—without theſe extraordinary gifts, in the moſt

literal ſenſe of the words, they *could* do nothing.—But beſides this plain application of the text to thoſe particular perſons and times, when GOD's ſpirit was poured down in that ſignal manner held ſacred to this day,—there is ſomething in them to be extended further, which chriſtians of all ages,—and, I hope, of all denominations, have ſtill a claim and truſt in,—and that is, the ordinary aſſiſtance and influences of the ſpirit of GOD in our hearts, for moral and virtuous improvements;—theſe, both in their natures as well as intentions, being altogether different from the others abovementioned conferred upon the diſciples of our Lord.—The one were miraculous gifts,—in which the endowed perſon contributed nothing, which advanced human nature above itſelf, and raiſed all its projectile ſprings above their fountains; enabling them to ſpeak and act ſuch things, and in ſuch manner, as was impoſſible for men not inſpired and preternaturally upheld.—In the other caſe, the helps ſpoken of were the influences

of GOD's ſpirit, which upheld us from falling below the dignity of our nature: —that divine aſſiſtance which graciouſly kept us from falling, and enabled us to perform the holy profeſſions of our religion.—Though theſe are equally called ſpiritual gifts,—they are not, as in the firſt caſe, the entire works of the ſpirit, —but the calm co-operations of it with our own endeavours; and are ordinarily what every ſincere and well-diſpoſed chriſtian has reaſon to pray for, and expect from the ſame fountain of ſtrength, —who has promiſed to give his holy ſpirit to them that aſk it.

From this point, which is the true doctrine of our church,—the two parties begin to divide both from it and each other;—each of them equally miſapplying theſe paſſages of Scripture, and wreſting them to extremes equally pernicious.—

To begin with the firſt; of whom, ſhould you enquire the explanation and meaning of this or of other texts,—wherein the aſſiſtance of GOD's grace

and holy ſpirit is implied as neceſſary to ſanctify our nature, and enable us to ſerve and pleaſe GOD?—They will anſwer,—That no doubt all our parts and abilities are the gifts of God,—who is the original author of our nature,—and, of conſequence, of all that belongs thereto. *That as by him we live, and move, and have our being*,—we muſt in courſe depend upon him for all our actions whatſoever,—ſince we muſt depend upon him even for our life, and for every moment of its continuance.—That from this view of our ſtate and natural dependence, it is certain they will ſay,—We can do nothing without his help.—But then they will add,—that it concerns us no farther as *chriſtians*, then as we are *men*;—the ſanctity of our lives, the religious habits and improvements of our hearts, in no other ſenſe depending upon GOD, than the moſt indifferent of our actions, or the natural exerciſe of any of the other powers he has given us.—Agreeably with this,—that the ſpiritual gifts ſpoken of in Scripture, are to be

underſtood by way of accommodation, to ſignify the natural or acquired gifts of a man's mind; ſuch as memory, fancy, wit, and eloquence; which, in a ſtrict and philoſophical ſenſe, may be called ſpiritual; — becauſe they tranſcend the mechanical powers of matter,—and proceed more or leſs from the rational ſoul, which is a ſpiritual ſubſtance.

Whether theſe ought, in propriety, to be called ſpiritual gifts, I ſhall not contend, as it ſeems a mere diſpute about words;—but it is enough that the interpretation cuts the knot, inſtead of untying it; and beſides, explains away all kind of meaning in the above promiſes. —And the error of them ſeems to ariſe, in the firſt place, from not diſtinguiſhing that theſe ſpiritual gifts,—if they muſt be called ſo,—ſuch as memory, fancy, and wit, and other endowments of the mind, which are known by the name of natural parts, belong merely to us as men;—and whether the different degrees, by which we excel each other in them, ariſe from a natural difference of our

ſouls,—or a happier diſpoſition of the organical parts of us. — They are ſuch, however, as GOD originally beſtows upon us, and with which, in a great meaſure, we are ſent into the world. But the moral gifts of the Holy Ghoſt,—which are more commonly called the fruits of the ſpirit, — cannot be confined within this deſcription. — We come not into the world equipt with virtues, as we do with talents;—if we did, we ſhould come into the world with that which robbed virtue of its beſt title both to preſent commendation and future reward.—The gift of continency depends not, as theſe affirm, upon a mere coldneſs of the conſtitution—or patience and humility from an inſenſibility of it;—but they are virtues inſenſibly wrought in us by the endeavours of our own wills and concurrent influences of a gracious agent;—and the religious improvements ariſing from thence, are ſo far from being the effects of nature, and a fit diſpoſition of the ſeveral parts and organical powers given us,—that the contrary is true;—namely,

—that the ſtream of our affections and appetites but too naturally carries us the other way.—For this, let any man lay his hand upon his heart, and reflect what has paſſed within him, in the ſeveral conflicts of meekneſs,—temperance,—chaſtity, and other ſelf-denials,—and he will need no better argument for his conviction.—

This hint leads to the true anſwer to the above miſinterpretation of the text, —That we depend upon GOD in no other ſenſe for our virtues,—than we neceſſarily do for every thing elſe; and that the fruits of the ſpirit are merely the determinations and efforts of our own reaſon,—and as much our own accompliſhments, as any other improvements are the effect of our own diligence and induſtry.

This account, by the way, is oppoſite to the apoſtle's—who tells us,—It is GOD that worketh in us both to do and will, of his good pleaſure.—It is true, —though we are born ignorant,—we can make ourſelves ſkilful;—we can acquire

arts and ſciences by our own application and ſtudy.—But the caſe is not the ſame in reſpect of goodneſs.—We can acquire arts and ſciences, becauſe we lie under no natural indiſpoſition or backwardneſs to that acquirement.—For nature, tho' it be corrupt, yet ſtill it is curious and buſy after knowledge.—But it does not appear, that to goodneſs and ſanctity of manners we have the ſame natural propenſity.—Luſts within, and temptations without, ſet up ſo ſtrong a confederacy againſt it, as we are never able to ſurmount by our own ſtrength.—However firmly we may think we ſtand,—the beſt of us are but upheld, and graciouſly kept upright; and whenever this divine aſſiſtance is withdrawn,—or ſuſpended,—all hiſtory, eſpecially the ſacred, is full of melancholy inſtances of what man is, when GOD leaves him to himſelf,—that he is even a thing of nought.

Whether it was from a conſcious experience of this truth in themſelves,—or ſome traditions handed from the Scripture account of it;—or that it was, in

ſome meaſure, deducible from the principles of reaſon,—in the writings of ſome of the wiſeſt of the heathen philoſophers, we find the ſtrongeſt traces of the perſuaſion of GOD's aſſiſting men to virtue and probity of manners.—One of the greateſt maſters of reaſoning amongſt the ancients acknowledges, that nothing great and exalted can be achieved, ſine divino afflatu;—and Seneca, to the ſame purpoſe, nulla mens bona ſine Deo;—that no ſoul can be good without divine aſſiſtance. — Now whatever comments may be put upon ſuch paſſages in their writings,—it is certain thoſe in Scripture can receive no other to be conſiſtent with themſelves, than what has been given.—And though, in vindication of human liberty, it is as certain on the other hand,—that education, precepts, examples, pious inclinations, and practical diligence, are great and meritorious advances towards a religious ſtate;—yet the ſtate itſelf is got and finiſhed by GOD's grace; and the concurrence of his ſpirit upon tempers thus happily pre-

diſpoſed, — and honeſtly making uſe of ſuch fit means:—and unleſs thus much is underſtood from them, — the ſeveral expreſſions in Scripture, where the offices of the Holy Ghoſt conducive to this end, are enumerated; — ſuch as cleanſing, guiding, renewing, comforting, ſtrengthening and eſtabliſhing us,—are a ſet of unintelligible words, which may amuſe, but can convey little light to the underſtanding.

This is all I have time left to ſay at preſent upon the firſt error of thoſe, who, by too looſe an interpretation of the gifts and fruits of the ſpirit, explain away the whole ſenſe and meaning of them, and thereby render not only the promiſes, but the comforts of them too, of none effect.—Concerning which error, I have only to add this by way of extenuation of it,—that I believe the great and unedifying rout made about ſanctification and regeneration in the middle of the laſt century, — and the enthuſiaſtic extravagances into which the communications of the

ſpirit have been carried by ſo many deluded or deluding people in this, are two of the great cauſes which have driven many a ſober man into the oppoſite extreme, againſt which I have argued.—Now if the dread of ſavouring too much of religion in their interpretations has done this ill ſervice, —let us inquire, on the other hand, whether the affectation of too *much* religion in the other extreme, has not miſled others full as far from truth, and further from the reaſon and ſobriety of the goſpel, than the firſt.

I have already proved by Scripture arguments, that the influence of the holy ſpirit of GOD is neceſſary to render the imperfect ſacrifice of our obedience pleaſing to our Maker.—He hath promiſed to *perfect his ſtrength in our weakneſs*.—With this aſſurance we ought to be ſatisfied;—eſpecially ſince our Saviour has thought proper to mortify all ſcrupulous inquiries into operations of this kind, by comparing them to the wind, *which bloweth where it liſteth; and*

thou heareſt the ſound thereof, but canſt not tell whence it cometh, or whither it goeth:—ſo is every one that is born of the ſpirit.—Let humble gratitude acknowledge the effect, unprompted by an idle curioſity to explain the cauſe.

We are told, without this aſſiſtance, we can do nothing;—we are told, from the ſame authority, we can do all through Chriſt that ſtrenghtens us.—We are commanded to *work out our own ſalvation with fear and trembling.* The reaſon immediately follows; *for it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do, of his own good pleaſure.*—From theſe, and many other repeated paſſages, it is evident, that the aſſiſtances of grace were not intended to deſtroy, but to co-operate with the endeavours of man,—and are derived from God in the ſame manner as all natural powers.—Indeed, without this interpretation, how could the Almighty addreſs himſelf to man as a rational being?—how could his actions be his own?—how could he be conſidered as a blameable or rewardable creature?

From this account of the conſiſtent opinions of a ſober-minded chriſtian, let us take a view of the miſtaken enthuſiaſt.—See him oſtentatiouſly clothed with the outward garb of ſanctity, to attract the eyes of the vulgar.—See a cheerful demeanour, the natural reſult of an eaſy and ſelf-applauding heart, ſtudiouſly avoided as criminal.—See his countenance overſpread with a melancholy gloom and deſpondence;—as if religion, which is evidently calculated to make us happy in this life as well as the next, was the parent of ſullenneſs and diſcontent.—Hear him pouring forth his phariſaical ejaculations on his journey, or in the ſtreets.—Hear him boaſting of extraordinary communications with the GOD of all knowledge, and at the ſame time offending againſt the common rules of his own native language, and the plainer dictates of common ſenſe.—Hear him arrogantly thanking his GOD, that he is not as other men are; and, with more than papal uncharitableneſs, very liberally

allotting the portion of the damned, to every chriſtian whom he, partial judge, deems leſs perfect than himſelf—to every chriſtian who is walking on in the paths of duty with ſober vigilance, aſpiring to perfection by progreſſive attainments, and ſeriouſly endeavouring through a rational faith in his Redeemer, to make his calling and election ſure.

There have been no ſects in the chriſtian world, however abſurd, which have not endeavoured to ſupport their opinions by arguments drawn from Scripture, miſinterpreted or miſapplied.

We had a melancholy inſtance of this in our own country, in the laſt century, —when the church of Chriſt, as well as the government, during that period of national confuſion, was torn aſunder into various ſects and factions; —when ſome men pretended to have Scripture precepts, parables, or prophecies to plead, in favour of the moſt impious abſurdities that falſehood could advance. The ſame ſpirit which pre-

vailed amongſt the fanatics, ſeems to have gone forth among theſe modern enthuſiaſts.—Faith, the diſtinguiſhing characteriſtic of a chriſtian, is defined by them not as a rational aſſent of the underſtanding, to truths which are eſtabliſhed by indiſputable authority, but as a violent perſuaſion of mind, that they are inſtantaneouſly become the children of GOD—that the whole ſcore of their ſins is for ever blotted out, without the payment of one tear of repentance.—Pleaſing doctrine this to the fears and paſſions of mankind!—promiſing fair to gain proſelytes of the vicious and impenitent.

Pardons and indulgencies are the great ſupport of papal power;—but theſe modern empirics in religion have improved upon the ſcheme, pretending to have diſcovered an infallible noſtrum for all incurables;—ſuch as will preſerve them for ever.—And notwithſtanding we have inſtances of notorious offenders among the warmeſt advocates for ſinleſs perfection,—the charm continues

powerful.—Did theſe viſionary notions of an heated imagination tend only to amuſe the fancy, they might be treated with contempt;—but when they depreciate all moral attainments;—when the ſuggeſtions of a frantic brain are blaſphemouſly aſcribed to the holy ſpirit of GOD;—when faith and divine love are placed in oppoſition to practical virtues, they then become the objects of averſion. In one ſenſe, indeed, many of theſe deluded people demand our tendereſt compaſſion,—whoſe diſorder is in the head rather than the heart: and who call for the aid of a phyſician who can cure the diſtempered ſtate of the body, rather than one who may ſooth the anxieties of the mind.

Indeed, in many caſes, they ſeem ſo much above the ſkill of either,—that unleſs GOD in his mercy rebuke this ſpirit of enthuſiaſm, which is gone out amongſt us, no one can pretend to ſay how far it may go, or what miſchiefs it may do in theſe kingdoms.—Already it has taught us as much blaſphemous

language;—and, if it goes on, by the ſamples given us in their journals, will fill us with as many legendary accounts of viſions and revelations, as we have formerly had from the church of Rome. And for any ſecurity we have againſt it, —when time ſhall ſerve, it may as effectually convert the profeſſors of it, even into popery itſelf,—conſiſtent with their own principles;—for they have nothing more to do than to ſay, that the ſpirit which inſpired them, has ſignified that the pope is inſpired as well as they,—and conſequently is infallible. —After which I cannot ſee how they can poſſibly refrain going to maſs, conſiſtent with their own principles.—

Thus much for theſe two oppoſite errors;—the examination of which has taken up ſo much time,—that I have little left to add, but to beg of GOD, by the aſſiſtance of his holy ſpirit, to preſerve us equally from both extremes, and enable us to form ſuch right and worthy apprehenſions of our holy religion,—that it may never ſuffer, through

the coolneſs of our conceptions of it, on one hand,—or the immoderate heat of them, on the other;—but that we may at all times ſee it, as it is, and as it was deſigned by its bleſſed Founder, as the moſt rational, ſober, and conſiſtent inſtitution that could have been given to the ſons of men.

Now to GOD, &c.

SERMON XXXIX.

Eternal Advantages of Religion.

ECCLESIASTES, XII. 13.

Let us hear the concluſion of the whole matter,—Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.

THE wiſe man, in the beginning of this book, had propoſed it as a grand query to be diſcuſſed,—*To find out what was good for the ſons of men, which they ſhould do under the heavens, all the days of their lives:*—That is, what was the fitteſt employment, and the chief and proper buſineſs, which they ſhould apply themſelves to in this world, —And here, in the text, after a fair diſcuſſion of the queſtion, he aſſerts it to be the buſineſs of religion,—the fearing God, and keeping his commandments. —This was the concluſion of the whole

matter,—and the natural reſult of all his debates and inquiries.—And I am perſuaded, the more obſervations we make upon the ſhort life of man,—the more we experience,—and the longer trials we have of the world,—and the ſeveral pretenſions it offers to our happineſs,—the more we ſhall be engaged to think, like him,—that we can never find what we look for in any other thing which we do under the heavens, except in that of duty and obedience to God.—In the courſe of the wiſe man's examination of this point,—we find a great many beautiful reflections upon human affairs, all tending to illuſtrate the concluſion he draws; and as they are ſuch as are apt to offer themſelves to the thoughts of every ſerious and conſiderate man,—I cannot do better than renew the impreſſions,—by retouching the principal arguments of his diſcourſe—before I proceed to the general uſe and application of the whole.

In the former part of his book he had taken into his conſideration thoſe ſeveral

ſtates of life to which men uſually apply themſelves for happineſs;—firſt, learning,—wiſdom;—next,—mirth, jollity, and pleaſure;—then power and greatneſs,—riches and poſſeſſions.—All of which are ſo far from anſwering the end for which they were at firſt purſued,—that, by a great variety of arguments,—he proves them ſeverally to be ſo many *ſore travels which God had given to the ſons of men to be exerciſed therewith*:—and inſtead of being any, or all of them, our proper end and employment, or ſufficient to our happineſs,—he makes it plain, by a ſeries of obſervations upon the life of man,—that they are ever likely to end with others where they had done with him,—that is, in vanity and vexation of ſpirit.

Then he takes notice of the ſeveral accidents of life, which perpetually rob us of what little ſweets the fruition of theſe objects might ſeem to promiſe us,—both with regard to our endeavours and our perſons in this world.

1ſt, With regard to our endeavours,—he ſhews that the moſt likely ways

and means are not always effectual for the attaining of their end:—that, in general,—the utmoſt that human councils and prudence can provide for, is to take care, when they contend in a race, that they be ſwifter than thoſe who run againſt them;—or when they are to fight a battle, that they be ſtronger than thoſe whom they are to encounter.—And yet afterwards, in the ninth chapter, he obſerves, that the race is not to the ſwift, nor the battle to the ſtrong;—neither yet bread to the wiſe,—nor yet riches to men of underſtanding, nor favour to men of ſkill;—but time and chance happens to them all.—That there are ſecret workings in human affairs, which over-rule all human contrivance, and counterplot the wiſeſt of our councils, in ſo ſtrange and unexpected a manner, as to caſt a damp upon our beſt ſchemes and warmeſt endeavours.

And then, for thoſe accidents to which our perſons are as liable as our labours, ——he obſerves theſe three things;—

firſt, the natural infirmities of our bodies, — which alternately lay us open to the ſad changes of pain and ſickneſs; which, in the fifth chapter, he ſtyles wrath and ſorrow; under which, when a man lies languiſhing, none of his worldly enjoyments will ſignify much. — Like one that ſingeth ſongs with a heavy heart, neither mirth, — nor power, — nor riches, ſhall afford him eaſe, —— nor will all their force be able ſo to ſtay the ſtroke of nature, — *but that he ſhall be cut off in the midſt of his days, and then all his thoughts periſh.* —— Or elſe, — what is no uncommon ſpectacle, in the midſt of all his luxury, he may waſte away the greateſt part of his life, with much wearineſs and anguiſh; and with the long torture of an unrelenting diſeaſe, he may wiſh himſelf to go down into the grave, and to be ſet at liberty from all his poſſeſſions, and all his miſery, at the ſame time.

2dly, If it be ſuppoſed, — that by the ſtrength of ſpirits, and the natural cheerfulneſs of a man's temper, he ſhould

eſcape theſe, *and live many years, and rejoice in them all*,—which is not the lot of many;—yet, *he muſt remember the days of darkneſs*;—that is,—they who devote themſelves to a perpetual round of mirth and pleaſure, cannot ſo manage matters as to avoid the thoughts of their *future ſtates*, and the anxiety about what ſhall become of them hereafter, when they are to depart out of this world;—that they cannot ſo crowd their heads, and fill up their time with other matters,—but that the remembrance of this will ſometimes be uppermoſt,—and thruſt itſelf upon their minds whenever they are retired and ſerious.—And as this will naturally preſent to them a dark proſpect of their future happineſs,—it muſt, at the ſame time, prove no ſmall damp and allay to what they would enjoy at preſent.

But, in the third place, ſuppoſe a man ſhould be able to avoid ſickneſs,—and to put the trouble of *theſe thoughts* likewiſe far from him,—yet there is ſomething elſe which he cannot poſſibly

decline; — old age will unavoidably ſteal upon him, with all the infirmities of it,——when (as he expreſſes it) *the grinders ſhall be few, and appetite ceaſes; when thoſe who look out of the windows ſhall be darkened, and the keepers of the houſe ſhall tremble;*—when a man ſhall become a burden to himſelf, and to his friends;——when, perhaps, thoſe of his neareſt relations, whom he hath moſt obliged by kindneſs, ſhall think it time for him to depart, to creep off the ſtage, and make room for the ſucceeding generations.

And then, after a little funeral pomp of *mourners going about the ſtreets*,—a man ſhall be buried out of the way, and in a year or two be as much forgotten, as if he had never exiſted.—For there is no remembrance (ſays he) of the wiſe more than the fool;—ſeeing that which now is, in the days to come, ſhall be forgotton; every day producing ſomething which ſeems new and ſtrange, to take up men's talk and wonder, and to drown the memory of former perſons and actions.—

And I appeal to any rational man, whether theſe are not ſome of the moſt material reflections about human affairs,—which occur to every one who gives himſelf the leaſt leiſure to think about them?—Now, from all theſe premiſes put together, Solomon infers this ſhort concluſion in the text,—That to fear GOD, and keep his commandments, is the whole duty of man;—that, to be ſerious in the matter of religion, and careful about our future ſtate, is that which, after all our other experiments, will be found to be our chief happineſs,—our greateſt intereſt,—our greateſt wiſdom,—and that which moſt of all deſerves our care and application.—This muſt ever be the laſt reſult, and the upſhot of every wiſe man's obſervations upon all theſe tranſitory things, and upon the vanity of their ſeveral pretences to our well-being;—and we may depend upon it as an everlaſting truth,—that we can never find what we ſeek for in any other courſe, or any other object,—but this one;—and the more we know and think, and the more expe-

rience we have of the world, and of ourſelves, the more we are convinced of this truth, and led back by it to reſt our ſouls upon that GOD from whence we came.—Every conſideration upon the life of man tends to engage us to this point,—to be in earneſt in the concernment of religion; to love and fear GOD;—to provide for our true intereſt,—and do ourſelves the moſt effectual ſervice,—by devoting ourſelves to him,—and always thinking of him,—as he is the true and final happineſs of a reaſonable and immortal ſpirit.

And indeed one would think it next to impoſſible,—did not the commonneſs of the thing take off from the wonder,—that a man who thinks at all,—ſhould let his whole life be a contradiction to ſuch obvious reflections.

The vanity and emptineſs of worldly goods and enjoyments,—the ſhortneſs and uncertainty of life,—the unalterable event hanging over our heads,—*that in a few days, we muſt all of us go to that place from whence we ſhall not return;*—

the certainty of this,—the uncertainty of the time when,—the immortality of the ſoul,—the doubtful and momentous iſſues of eternity,—the terrors of damnation, and the glorious things which are ſpoken of the city of GOD, are meditations ſo obvious, and ſo naturally check and block up a man's way,—are ſo very intereſting, and, above all, ſo unavoidable,—that it is aſtoniſhing how it was poſſible, at any time, for mortal man to have his head full of any thing elſe!——And yet, was the ſame perſon to take a view of the ſtate of the world,—how ſlight an obſervation would convince him, that the wonder lay, in fact, on the other ſide;—and that, as wiſely as we all diſcourſe, and philoſophiſe *de contemptu mundi & fugâ ſæculi*—yet, for one who really acts in the world—conſiſtent with his own reflections upon it,—that there are multitudes who ſeem to take aim at nothing higher;—and, as empty a thing as it is,—are ſo dazzled with, as to think it meet to build tabernacles of reſt upon it,——and ſay,

It is good to be here.—Whether, as an able inquirer into this paradox gueſſes,—whether it is, that men do not heartily believe ſuch a thing as a future ſtate of happineſs and miſery,—or if they do,—that they do not actually and ſeriouſly conſider it,—but ſuffer it to lie dormant and unactive within them, and ſo are as little affected with it, as if, in truth, they believed it not;—or whether they look upon it through that end of the perſpective which repreſents as afar off,—and ſo are more forcibly drawn by the nearer, though the leſſer, loadſtone;—whether theſe, or whatever other cauſe may be aſſigned for it,—the obſervation is inconteſtible, that the bulk of mankind, in paſſing through this vale of miſery,—uſe it *not as a well* to refreſh and allay,—but fully to quench and ſatisfy their thirſt;—minding or (as the Apoſtle ſays) reliſhing earthly things,——making them the end and ſum-total of their deſires and wiſhes,——and, in one word,——loving this world—juſt as they are commanded to

love GOD;—that is,—*with all their heart, with all their ſoul*,—with all their mind and ſtrength.—But this is not the ſtrangeſt part of this paradox.—A man ſhall not only lean and reſt upon the world with his whole ſtreſs,—but, in many inſtances, ſhall live notoriouſly bad and vicious;—when he is reproved, he ſhall ſeem convinced;—when he is obſerved,——he ſhall be aſhamed;—when he purſues his ſin,——he will do it in the dark;—and when he has done it, ſhall even be diſſatisfied with himſelf:——yet ſtill, this ſhall produce no alteration in his conduct.—Tell him he ſhall one day die;——or bring the event ſtill nearer,—and ſhew, that, according to the courſe of nature, he cannot poſſibly live many years,—he will ſigh, perhaps,—— and tell you he is convinced of that as much as reaſon and experience can make him:——proceed and urge to him,—that after death comes judgment, and that he will certainly there be dealt with by a juſt GOD according to his actions;—he will thank

God he is no deiſt,—and tell you, with the ſame grave face,—he is thoroughly convinced of that too;—and as he believes,—no doubt, he trembles too:—and yet after all, with all this conviction upon his mind, you will ſee him ſtill perſevere in the ſame courſe,—and commit his ſin with as certain an event and reſolution, as if he knew no argument againſt it.—— Theſe notices of things, however terrible and true, paſs through his underſtanding as an eagle through the air, that leaves no path behind.

So that, upon the whole, inſtead of abounding with occcaſions to ſet us ſeriouſly on thinking,—the world might diſpenſe with many more calls of this kind;—and were they ſeven times as many as they are,—conſidering what inſufficient uſe we make of thoſe we have, all, I fear, would be little enough to bring theſe things to our remembrance as often, and engage us to lay them to our hearts with that affectionate concern, which the weight and intereſt of them

requires at our hands.—Sooner or later, the moſt inconſiderate of us all ſhall find, with Solomon,—that to do this effectually, is the whole of man.

And I cannot conclude this diſcourſe upon his words better than with a ſhort and earneſt exhortation, that the ſolemnity of this ſeaſon,—and the meditations to which it is devoted, may lead you up to the true knowledge and practice of the ſame point, of fearing GOD and keeping his commandments,—and convince you, as it did him, of the indiſpenſable neceſſity of making that the buſineſs of a man's life, which is the chief end of his being,—the eternal happineſs and ſalvation of his ſoul.

Which may GOD grant, for the ſake of Jeſus Chriſt. Amen.

SERMON XL.

Aſa: a Thankſgiving Sermon.

2 CHRONICLES, XV. 14.

And they ſware unto the Lord with a loud voice, and with ſhouting, and with trumpets, and with cornets.—And all the men of Judah rejoiced at the oath.

IT will be neceſſary to give a particular account of what was the occaſion, as well as the nature of the oath which the men of Judah ſware unto the Lord;—— which will explain not only the reaſons why it became a matter of ſo much joy to them, but likewiſe admit of an application ſuitable to the purpoſes of this ſolemn aſſembly.

Abijah, and Aſa his ſon, were ſucceſſive kings of Judah.—The firſt came to the crown at the cloſe of a long, and, in the end, a very unſucceſsful war, which had gradually waſted the ſtrength and riches of his kingdom.

He was a prince endowed with the talents which the emergencies of his country required, and ſeemed born to make Judah a victorious, as well as a happy people.——The conduct and great ſucceſs of his arms againſt Jeroboam, had well eſtabliſhed the firſt;—but his kingdom, which had been ſo many years the ſeat of a war, had been ſo waſted and bewildered, that his reign, good as it was, was too ſhort to accompliſh the latter.—He died, and left the work unfiniſhed for his ſon.—Aſa ſucceeded, in the room of Abijah his father, with the trueſt notions of religion and government that could be fetched either from reaſon or experience.—His reaſon told him, that God ſhould be worſhipped in ſimplicity and ſingleneſs of heart;—therefore he took away the altars of the ſtrange gods, and broke down their images.—His experience told him, that the moſt ſucceſsful wars, inſtead of invigorating, more generally drained away the vitals of government,—and, at the beſt, ended but in a brighter and more oſtentatious kind

of poverty and deſolation :—therefore he laid aſide his ſword, and ſtudied the arts of ruling Judah with peace.—Conſcience would not ſuffer Aſa to ſacrifice his ſubjects to private views of ambition, and wiſdom forbad he ſhould ſuffer them to offer up themſelves to the pretence of public ones ;—ſince enlargement of empire, by the deſtruction of its people (the natural and only valuable ſource of ſtrength and riches), was a diſhoneſt and miſerable exchange.—And however well the glory of a conqueſt might appear in the eyes of a common beholder, yet, when bought at that coſtly rate, a father to his country would behold the triumphs which attended it, and weep, as it paſſed by him.—Amidſt all the glare and jollity of the day, the parent's eyes would fix attentively upon his child ;—he would diſcern him drooping under the weight of his attire, without ſtrength or vigour, his former beauty and comelineſs gone off :—he would behold the coat of many colours ſtained with blood, and cry,—Alas ! they have decked thee with a pa-

rent's pride, but not with a parent's care and foreſight.

With ſuch affectionate ſentiments of government, and juſt principles of religion, Aſa began his reign.—A reign marked out with new æras, and a ſucceſſion of happier occurrences than what had diſtinguiſhed former days.

The juſt and gentle ſpirit of the prince inſenſibly ſtole into the breaſts of the people.—The men of Judah turned their ſwords into ploughſhares, and their ſpears into pruning-hooks.—By induſtry and virtuous labour they acquired what by ſpoil and rapine they might have ſought after long in vain.—The traces of their late troubles ſoon began to wear out.—The cities, which had become ruinous and deſolate (the prey of famine and the ſword), were now rebuilt, fortified, and made populous.—Peace, ſecurity, wealth, and proſperity, ſeemed to compoſe the whole hiſtory of Aſa's reign.—O Judah! what could then have been done more than what was done to make thy people happy?—

What one bleſſing was withheld, that thou ſhouldſt ever withhold thy thankfulneſs?—

That thou didſt not continually turn thy eyes towards heaven with an habitual ſenſe of GOD's mercies, and devoutly praiſe him for ſetting Aſa over you?

Were not the public bleſſings, and the private enjoyments, which every man of Judah derived from them, ſuch as to make the continuance of them deſirable?—and what other way was there to effect it, than to ſwear unto the Lord, with all your hearts and ſouls, to perform the covenant made with your fathers?—to ſecure that favour and intereſt with the almighty Being, without which the wiſdom of this world is fooliſhneſs, and the beſt connected ſyſtems of human policy are ſpeculative and airy projects, without foundation or ſubſtance.——The hiſtory of their own exploits and eſtabliſhment, ſince they had become a nation, was a ſtrong confirmation of this doctrine.

But too free and uninterrupted a poſſeſſion of God Almighty's bleſſings ſometimes (though it ſeems ſtrange to ſuppoſe it) even tempts men to forget him, either from a certain depravity and ingratitude of nature, not to be wrought upon by goodneſs, — or that they are made by it too paſſionately fond of the preſent hour, and too thoughtleſs of its great Author, whoſe kind providence brought it about.—This ſeemed to have been the caſe with the men of Judah :— for notwithſtanding all that God had done for them, in placing Abijah and Aſa his ſon over them, and inſpiring them with hearts and talents proper to retrieve the errors of the foregoing reign, and bring back peace and plenty to the dwellings of Judah ;—yet there appears no record of any ſolemn and religious acknowledgment to God for ſuch ſignal favours.—The people ſat down in a thankleſs ſecurity, each man under his vine, to eat and drink, and roſe up to play ;—— more ſolicitous to enjoy their bleſſings, than to deſerve them.

But this ſcene of tranquillity was not to ſubſiſt without ſome change;—and it ſeemed as if Providence at length had ſuffered the ſtream to be interrupted, to make them conſider whence it flowed, and how neceſſary it had been all along to their ſupport.—The Ethiopians, ever ſince the beginning of Abijah's reign, until the tenth year of Aſa's, had been at peace, or, at leaſt, whatever ſecret enmity they bore, had made no open attacks upon the kingdom of Judah.—And indeed the bad meaſures which Rehoboam had taken, in the latter part of the reign which immediately preceded theirs, ſeemed to have ſaved the Ethiopians the trouble.—For Rehoboam, though in the former part of his reign he dealt wiſely; yet, when he had eſtabliſhed his kingdom, and ſtrengthened himſelf,—he forſook the laws of the Lord;—he forſook the counſel which the old men gave him, and took counſel with the young men, which were brought up with him, and ſtood before him.—Such ill-adviſed meaſures, in all

probability, had given the enemies of Judah ſuch deciſive advantages over her, that they had ſat down contented, and for many years enjoyed the fruits of their acquiſitions.——But the friendſhip of princes is ſeldom made up of better materials than thoſe which are every day to be ſeen in private life,——in which ſincerity and affection are not at all conſidered as ingredients.——Change of time and circumſtances produces a change of councils and behaviour.—Judah, in length of time, had become a freſh temptation, and was worth fighting for.—Her riches and plenty might firſt make her enemies covet, and then the remembrance of how cheap and eaſy a prey ſhe had formerly been, might make them not doubt of obtaining.

By theſe apparent motives (or whether God, who ſometimes over-rules the heart of man, was pleaſed to turn them by ſecret ones, to the purpoſes of his wiſdom), the ambition of the Ethiopians revived, with an hoſt of men numerous as the ſand upon the ſea-ſhore in

multitude.—They had left their country, and were coming forwards to invade them.—What can Judah propoſe to do in ſo terrifying a criſis?—where can ſhe betake herſelf for refuge?—on one hand, her religion and laws are too precious to be given up, or truſted to the hands of a ſtranger;—and, on the other hand, how can ſo ſmall a kingdom, juſt recovering ſtrength, ſurrounded by an army of a thouſand thouſand men, beſides chariots and horſes, be able to withſtand ſo powerful a ſhock?—But here it appeared that thoſe, who, in their proſperity, can forget GOD, do yet remember him in the day of danger and diſtreſs;—and can begin with comfort to depend upon his providence, when with comfort they can depend upon nothing elſe.—For when Zerah, the Ethiopian, was come unto the valley of Zephatha at Maretha, Aſa, and all the men of Judah and Benjamin, went out againſt him;—and as they went, they cried mightily unto GOD.—And Aſa prayed for his people, and he ſaid,—"O Lord! it is nothing

with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power:—help us, O Lord our GOD! for we reſt in thee, and in thy name we go againſt this multitude.—O Lord, thou art our GOD, let not man prevail againſt thee."—Succeſs almoſt ſeemed a debt due to the piety of the prince, and the contrition of his people.—So GOD ſmote the Ethiopians, and they could not recover themſelves:—for they were ſcattered, and utterly deſtroyed,—before the Lord, and before his hoſt. And as they returned to Jeruſalem from purſuing,—behold the ſpirit of GOD came upon Aſariah, the ſon of Oded.—And he went out to meet Aſa, and he ſaid unto him,—Hear ye me, Aſa, and all Judah and Benjamin; the Lord is with you, whilſt you are with him;—and if you ſeek him, he will be found of you, but if ye forſake him, he will forſake you.—Nothing could more powerfully call home the conſcience than ſo timely an expoſtulation.—The men of Judah and Benjamin, ſtruck with a ſenſe of

their late deliverance, and the many other felicities they had enjoyed ſince Aſa was king over them, they gathered themſelves together at Jeruſalem, in the third month in the fifteenth year of Aſa's reign;—and they entered into a covenant to ſeek the Lord GOD of their fathers, with all their heart, and with all their ſoul:—and they ſware unto the Lord with a loud voice, and with ſhouting, and with trumpets, and with cornets, and all Judah rejoiced at the oath.

One may obſerve a kind of luxuriety in the deſcription, which the holy hiſtorian gives of the tranſport of the men of Judah upon this occaſion.—And ſure, if ever matter of joy was ſo reaſonably founded, as to excuſe any exceſſes in the expreſſions of it,—this was one:—for without it,—the condition of Judah, though otherwiſe the happieſt, would have been, of all nations under heaven, the moſt miſerable.

Let us ſuppoſe a moment, inſtead of being repulſed, that the enterpriſe of the Ethiopians had proſpered againſt

them, — like other grievous diſtempers, where the vitals are firſt attacked,—Aſa, their king, would have been ſought after and have been made the firſt ſacrifice.— He muſt either have fallen by the ſword of battle, or execution; or, what is worſe, he muſt have ſurvived the ruin of his country by flight,—and worn out the remainder of his days in ſorrow, for the afflictions which were come upon it.— In ſome remote corner of the world, the good king would have heard the particulars of Judah's deſtruction. — He would have been told how the country, which had become dear to him by his paternal care, was now utterly laid waſte and all his labour loſt;—how the fences which protected it were torn up, and the tender plant within, which he had ſo long ſheltered, was cruelly trodden under foot and devoured. — He would hear how Zerah, the Ethiopian, when he had overthrown the kingdom, thought himſelf bound in conſcience to overthrow the religion of it too, and eſtabliſh his own idolatrous one in its ſtead.

—That, in purſuance of this, the holy religion, which Aſa had reformed, had begun every where to be evil ſpoken of, and evil entreated:

That it was firſt baniſhed from the courts of the king's houſe, and the midſt of Jeruſalem,—and then fled for ſafety out of the way into the wilderneſs, and found no city to dwell in:—That Zerah had rebuilt the altars of the ſtrange gods, —which Aſa's piety had broken down, and ſet up their images:

That his commandment was *urgent* that all ſhould fall down and worſhip the idol he had made:—That, to complete the tale of their miſeries, there was no proſpect of deliverance for any but the worſt of his ſubjects;—thoſe who, in his reign, had either leaned in their hearts towards theſe idolatries,—or whoſe principles and morals were ſuch, that all religions ſuited them alike.—But that the honeſt and conſcientious men of Judah, unable to behold ſuch abominations, hung down every man his head

like a bulruſh, and put ſack-cloth and aſhes under him.

This picture of Judah's deſolation might be ſome reſemblance of what every of Aſa's ſubjects would probably form to himſelf, the day he ſolemnized an exemption from it.—And the tranſport was natural,—To ſwear unto the Lord with a loud voice, and with ſhouting, and with trumpets, and with cornets;—to rejoice at the oath which ſecured their future peace, and celebrate it with all external marks of gladneſs.

I have at length gone through the ſtory, which gave the occaſion to this religious act which is recorded of the men of Judah in the text.

I believe there is not one, in ſacred Scripture, that bids fairer for a parallel to our own times, or that would admit of an application more ſuitable to the ſolemnity of this day.

But men are apt to be ſtruck with likeneſſes in ſo different a manner, from the different points of view in which

they ſtand, as well as their diverſity of judgments, that it is generally a very unacceptable piece of officiouſneſs to fix any certain degrees of approach.

In this caſe, it ſeems ſufficient,—that thoſe who will diſcern the leaſt reſemblance, will diſcern enough to make them ſeriouſly comply with the devotion of the day;—and that thoſe who are affected with it in a ſtronger manner, and ſee the bleſſing of a proteſtant king in its faireſt light, with all the mercies which made way for it, will have ſtill more abundant reaſon to adore that good Being, which has all along protected it from the enemies which have riſen up to do it violence;—but more eſpecially, in a late inſtance, by turning down the councils of the froward headlong,—and confounding the devices of the crafty,—ſo that their hands could not perform their enterpriſe.—Though this event, for many reaſons, will ever be told amongſt the felicities of theſe days;—— yet for none more ſo,—than that it has given us a freſh mark of the continuation

of God Almighty's favour to us:—a part of that great complicated bleſſing for which we are gathered together to return him thanks.

Let us, therefore, I beſeech you, endeavour to do it in the way which becomes wiſe men, and which is likely to be moſt acceptable;—and that is,——to purſue the intentions of his providence, in giving us the occaſion——to become better men, and, by an holy and an honeſt converſation, make ourſelves capable of enjoying what God has done for us.—In vain ſhall we celebrate the day with a loud voice, and with ſhouting, and with trumpets, if we do not do it likewiſe with the internal and more certain marks of ſincerity,—a reformation and purity in our manners.—It is impoſſible a ſinful people can either be grateful to God, or properly loyal to their prince.—They cannot be grateful to the one, becauſe they live not under a ſenſe of his mercies;—nor can they be loyal to the other, becauſe they daily offend in two of the tendereſt points which concern his welfare.

By firſt diſengaging the providence of GOD from taking to our part, and then giving a heart to our adverſaries to lift their hands againſt us, who muſt know, that, if we forſake GOD, GOD will forſake us.—Their hopes, their deſigns, their wickedneſs againſt us, can only be built upon ours towards God.

For if they did not think we did evil, they durſt not hope we could periſh.

Ceaſe, therefore, to do evil;—for by following righteouſneſs, you will make the hearts of your enemies faint, they will turn their backs againſt your indignation, —and their weapons will fall from their hands.

Which may GOD grant, through the merits and mediation of his Son Jeſus Chriſt, to whom be all honour, &c. Amen.

SERMON XLI.

Follow Peace.

HEBREWS, XII. 14.

Follow peace with all men, and holineſs, without which no man ſhall ſee the Lord.

THE great end and deſign of our holy religion, next to the main view of reconciling us to GOD, was to reconcile us to each other;—by teaching us to ſubdue all thoſe unfriendly diſpoſitions in our nature, which unfit us for happineſs, and the ſocial enjoyment of the many bleſſings which GOD has enabled us to partake of in this world, miſerable as it is in many reſpects.—Could chriſtianity perſuade the profeſſors of it into this temper, and engage us, as its doctrine requires, to go on and exalt our natures, and, after the ſubduction of the moſt unfriendly of our paſſions, to plant,

in the room of them, all thoſe (more natural to the ſoil) humane and benevolent inclinations, which, in imitation of the perfections of GOD, ſhould diſpoſe us to extend our love and goodneſs to our fellow-creatures, according to the extent of our abilities;—in like manner, as the goodneſs of GOD extends itſelf over all the works of the creation:—could this be accompliſhed,—the world would be worth living in;—and might be conſidered by us as a foretaſte of what we ſhould enter upon hereafter.

But ſuch a ſyſtem, you'll ſay, is merely viſionary;—and, conſidering man as a creature ſo beſet with ſelfiſhneſs, and other fretful paſſions that propenſity prompts him to, though it is to be wiſhed, it is not to be expected.—But our religion enjoins us to approach as near this fair pattern as we can; and, if it be poſſible, as much as lieth in us, to live peaceably with all men;—where the term,—If poſſible, I own, implies it may not only be difficult, but ſometimes impoſſible.—Thus the words of

the text,—Follow peace,—may by ſome be thought to imply,—that this deſirable bleſſing may ſometimes fly from us:—but ſtill we are required to follow it, and not ceaſe the purſuit, till we have uſed all warrantable methods to regain and ſettle it:—becauſe, adds the apoſtle, without this frame of mind, no man ſhall ſee the Lord. For heaven is the region, as well as the recompence, of peace and benevolence; and ſuch as do not deſire and promote it here, are not qualified to enjoy it hereafter.

For this cauſe, in Scripture language,—peace is always ſpoke of as the great and comprehenſive bleſſing, which included in it all manner of happineſs;—and to wiſh peace to any houſe or perſon, was, in one word, to wiſh them all that was good and deſirable.—Becauſe happineſs conſiſts in the inward complacency and ſatisfaction of the mind; and he who has ſuch a diſpoſition of ſoul, as to acquieſce and reſt contented with all the events of providence, can want nothing this world can give him.—Agreeable to

this, that ſhort but moſt comprehenſive hymn, ſung by angels at our Saviour's birth, declaratory of the joy and happy ends of his incarnation,—after glory, in the firſt, to GOD,—the next note which ſounded was, Peace upon earth, and good-will to men. It was a public wiſh of happineſs to mankind, and implied a ſolemn charge to purſue the means that would ever lead to it.—And, in truth, the good tidings of the goſpel are nothing elſe but a grand meſſage and embaſſy of peace, to let us know, that our peace is made in heaven.

The prophet Iſaiah ſtyles our Saviour the Prince of Peace, long before he came into the world;—and to anſwer the title, he made choice to enter into it at a time when all nations were at peace with each other; which was in the days of Auguſtus,—when the temple of Janus was ſhut, and all the alarms of war were huſhed and ſilenced throughout the world.—At his birth, the hoſt of heaven deſcended, and proclaimed peace on earth, as the beſt ſtate and temper the

world could be in to receive and welcome the Author of it.—His future converſation and doctrine, here upon earth, was every way agreeable with his peaceable entrance upon it; the whole courſe of his life being but one great example of meekneſs, peace, and patience.—At his death, it was the only legacy he bequeathed to his followers: —My peace I give unto you.—How far this has taken place, or been actually enjoyed,—is not my intention to enlarge upon, any further than juſt to obſerve how precious a bequeſt it was, from the many miſeries and calamities which have, and ever will, enſue from the want of it. —If we look into the larger circle of the world,—what deſolations, diſſolutions of government, and invaſions of property! —what rapine, plunder, and profanation of the moſt ſacred rights of mankind, are the certain unhappy effects of it!—fields dyed in blood,—the cries of orphans and widows, bereft of their beſt help, too fully inſtruct us.—Look into private life,—behold how good and plea-

ſant a thing it is to live together in unity;—it is like the precious ointment poured upon the head of Aaron, that run down to his ſkirts;—importing, that this balm of life is felt and enjoyed, not only by governors of kingdoms, but is derived down to the loweſt rank of life, and taſted in the moſt private receſſes;—all, from the king to the peaſant, are refreſhed with its bleſſings, without which we can find no comfort in any thing this world can give.—It is this bleſſing gives every one to ſit quietly under his vine, and reap the fruits of his labour and induſtry:—in one word,—which beſpeaks who is the beſtower of it—it is that only which keeps up the harmony and order of the world, and preſerves every thing in it from ruin and confuſion.

There is one ſaying of our Saviour's, recorded by St. Matthew, which, at firſt ſight, ſeems to carry ſome oppoſition to this doctrine;—I came not to ſend peace on earth, but a ſword.—But this reaches no farther than the bare words, not en-

tering ſo deep as to affect the ſenſe, or imply any contradiction:—intimating only,—that the preaching of the goſpel will prove in the event, through ſundry unhappy cauſes, ſuch as prejudices, the corruption of men's hearts, a paſſion for idolatry and ſuperſtition, the occaſion of much variance and diviſion even amongſt neareſt relations;—yea, and oft-times of bodily death, and many calamities and perſecutions, which actually enſued upon the firſt preachers and followers of it.—Or the words may be underſtood,—as a beautiful deſcription of the inward conteſts and oppoſition which chriſtianity would occaſion in the heart of man,—from its oppoſitions to the violent paſſions of our nature,—which would engage us in a perpetual warfare.—This was not only a ſword,—a diviſion betwixt neareſt kindred;—but it was dividing a man againſt himſelf;—ſetting up an oppoſition to an intereſt long eſtabliſhed,—ſtrong by nature,—more ſo by uncontrouled cuſtom.—This is verified every hour in the ſtruggles for maſtery betwixt

the principles of the world, the fleſh and the devil;—which ſet up ſo ſtrong a confederacy, that there is need of all the helps which reaſon and chriſtianity can offer to bring them down.

But this contention is not that againſt which ſuch exhortations in the goſpel are levelled;—for the Scripture muſt be interpreted by Scripture, and be made conſiſtent with itſelf.—And we find the diſtinguiſhing marks and doctrines, by which all men were to know who were Chriſt's diſciples,—was that benevolent frame of mind towards all our fellow-creatures, which, by itſelf, is a ſufficient ſecurity for the particular ſocial duty here recommended:—ſo far from meditations of war;—for love thinketh no evil to his neighbour;—ſo far from doing any, it harbours not the leaſt thought of it;—but on the contrary, rejoices with them that rejoice, and weeps with them that weep.

This debt chriſtianity has highly exalted; though it is a debt that we were ſenſible of before, and acknowledged

to be owed to human nature,—which, as we all partake of,—ſo ought we to pay it in a ſuitable reſpect.—For, as men, we are allied together in the natural bond of brotherhood, and are members one of another.—We have the ſame Father in heaven, who made us and takes care of us all.—Our earthly extraction too is nearer alike, than the pride of the world cares to be reminded of:—for Adam was the father of us all, and Eve the mother of all living.—The prince and the beggar ſprung from the ſame ſtocks, as wide aſunder as the branches are.—So that, in this view, the moſt upſtart family may vie antiquity, and compare families with the greateſt monarchs.—We are all formed too of the ſame mould, and muſt equally return to the ſame duſt.—So that, to love our neighbour, and live quietly with him, is to live at peace with ourſelves.—He is but ſelf-multiplied, and enlarged into another form; and to be unkind or cruel to him, is but, as Solomon obſerves of the unmerciful, to be

cruel to our own fleſh.—As a farther motive and engagement to this peaceable commerce with each other,—God has placed us all in one another's power by turns,—in a condition of mutual need and dependence. There is no man ſo liberally ſtocked with earthly bleſſings, as to be able to live without another man's aid.—God, in his wiſdom, has ſo diſpenſed his gifts, in various kinds and meaſures, as to render us helpful, and make a ſocial intercourſe indiſpenſable.—The prince depends on the labour and induſtry of the peaſant;—and the wealth and honour of the greateſt perſons are fed and ſupported from the ſame ſource.

This the Apoſtle hath elegantly ſet forth to us by the familiar reſemblance of the natural body;—wherein there are many members, and all have not the ſame office; but the different faculties and operations of each, are for the uſe and benefit of the whole.—The eye ſees not for itſelf, but for the other members;—and is ſet up as a light to

direct them:—the feet ſerve to ſupport and carry about the other parts; and the hands act and labour for them all. It is the ſame in ſtates and kingdoms, wherein there are many members, yet each in their ſeveral functions and employments; which, if peaceably diſcharged, are for the harmony of the whole ſtate.—Some are eyes and guides to the blind;—others, feet to the lame and impotent;—ſome to ſupply the place of the head, to aſſiſt with council and direction;—others the hand, to be uſeful by their labour and induſtry.—To make this link of dependence ſtill ſtronger,—there is a great portion of mutability in all human affairs, to make benignity of temper not only our duty, but our intereſt and wiſdom.—There is no condition in life ſo fixed and permanent as to be out of danger, or the reach of change:—and we all may depend upon it, that we ſhall take our turns of wanting and deſiring.—By how many unforeſeen cauſes may riches take wing!—The crowns of princes may be

ſhaken, and the greateſt that ever awed the world have experienced what the turn of the wheel can do. That which hath happened to one man, may befal another; and, therefore, that excellent rule of our Saviour's ought to govern us in all our actions,—Whatſoever ye would that men ſhould do to you, do you alſo to them likewiſe.—Time and chance happens to all;—and the moſt affluent may be ſtript of all, and find his worldly comforts like ſo many withered leaves dropping from him.—Sure nothing can better become us, than hearts ſo full of our dependance as to overflow with mercy, and pity, and good-will towards mankind. To exhort us to this is, in other words, to exhort us to follow peace with all men:—the firſt is the root,—this the fair fruit and happy product of it.

Therefore, my beloved brethren, in the bowels of mercy, let us put away anger, and malice, and evil ſpeaking;—let us fly all clamour and ſtrife; let us be kindly affected one to another,

—following peace with all men, and holineſs, that we may ſee the Lord.

Which GOD of his infinite mercy grant, through the merits of his Son, our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

SERMON XLII.

Search the Scriptures.

ST. JOHN, V. 39.
Search the Scriptures.

THAT things of the moſt ineſtimable uſe and value, for want of due application and ſtudy laid out upon them, may be paſſed by unregarded, nay, even looked upon with coldneſs and averſion, is a truth too evident to need enlarging on.—Nor is it leſs certain that prejudices, contracted by an unhappy education, will ſometimes ſo ſtop up all the paſſages to our hearts, that the moſt amiable objects can never find acceſs, or bribe us by all their charms into juſtice and impartiality.—It would be paſſing the rendereſt reflection upon the age we live in, to ſay it is owing to one of theſe, that thoſe ineſtimable

books, the Sacred Writings, meet ſo often with a diſreliſh (what makes the accuſation almoſt incredible) amongſt perſons who ſet up for men of taſte and delicacy; who pretend to be charmed with what they call beauties and nature in claſſical authors, and in other things would bluſh not to be reckoned amongſt ſound and impartial critics.—But ſo far has negligence and prepoſſeſſion ſtopped their ears againſt the voice of the charmer, that they turn over thoſe awful ſacred pages with inattention and an unbecoming indifference, unaffected amidſt ten thouſand ſublime and noble paſſages, which, by the rules of ſound criticiſm and reaſon, may be demonſtrated to be truly eloquent and beautiful.

Indeed the opinion of falſe Greek and barbarous language, in the Old and New Teſtament, had, for ſome ages, been a ſtumbling-block to another ſet of men, who were profeſſedly great readers and admirers of the ancients.—The Sacred Writings were, by theſe

perſons, rudely attacked on all ſides: expreſſions which came not within the compaſs of their learning, were branded with barbariſm and ſoleciſm; words which ſcarce ſignified any thing but the ignorance of thoſe who laid ſuch groundleſs charges on them.—Preſumptuous man!—Shall he, who is but duſt and aſhes, dare to find fault with the words of that Being, who firſt inſpired man with language, and taught his mouth to utter;—who opened the lips of the dumb, and made the infant eloquent!—Theſe perſons, as they attacked the inſpired writings on the foot of critics and men of learning, accordingly have been treated as ſuch:—and tho' a ſhorter way might have been gone to work, which was,—that as their accuſations reached no farther than the bare words and phraſeology of the Bible, they, in no wiſe, affected the ſentiments and ſoundneſs of the doctrines, which were conveyed with as much clearneſs and perſpicuity to mankind, as they could have been, had the language been written

with the utmoſt elegance and grammatical nicety. And even though the charge of barbarous idioms could be made out;—yet the cauſe of chriſtianity was thereby no ways affected, but remained juſt in the ſtate they found it.—Yet, unhappily for them, they even miſcarried in their favourite point;—there being few, if any at all, of the Scripture expreſſions, which may not be juſtified by numbers of parallel modes of ſpeaking, made uſe of amongſt the pureſt and moſt authentic Greek authors.—This, an able hand amongſt us, not many years ago, has ſufficiently made out, and thereby baffled and expoſed all their preſumptions and ridiculous aſſertions.—Theſe perſons, bad and deceitful as they were, are yet far outgone by a third ſet of men.—I wiſh we had not too many inſtances of them, who, like foul ſtomachs, that turn the ſweeteſt food to bitterneſs, upon all occaſions endeavour to make merry with ſacred Scripture, and turn every thing they meet with therein into banter and

burleſque.—But as men of this ſtamp, by their exceſs of wickedneſs and weakneſs together, have entirely diſarmed us from arguing with them as reaſonable creatures, it is not only making them too conſiderable, but likewiſe to no purpoſe to ſpend much time about them, they being, in the language of the Apoſtle, creatures of no underſtanding, ſpeaking evil of things they know not, and ſhall utterly periſh in their own corruption.—Of theſe two laſt, the one is diſqualified for being argued with, and the other has no occaſion for it; they being already ſilenced.—Yet thoſe that were firſt mentioned, may not altogether be thought unworthy of our endeavours;—being perſons, as was hinted above, who, though their taſtes are ſo far vitiated that they cannot reliſh the Sacred Scriptures, yet have imaginations capable of being raiſed by the fancied excellencies of claſſical writers.—And indeed theſe perſons claim from us ſome degree of pity, when, through the unſkilfulneſs of preceptors in their

youth, or ſome other unhappy circumſtance in their education, they have been taught to form falſe and wretched notions of good writing.—When this is the caſe, it is no wonder they ſhould be more touched and affected with the dreſſed-up trifles and empty conceits of poets and rhetoricians, than they are with that true ſublimity and grandeur of ſentiment which glow throughout every page of the inſpired writings.—By way of information, ſuch ſhould be inſtructed:—

There are two ſorts of eloquence, the one indeed ſcarce deſerves the name of it, which conſiſts chiefly in laboured and poliſhed periods, an over-curious, and artificial arrangement of figures, tinſel'd over with a gaudy embelliſhment of words, which glitter, but convey little or no light to the underſtanding.—This kind of writing is for the moſt part much affected and admired by the people of weak judgment and vicious taſte, but is a piece of affectation and formality the ſacred writers are ut-

ter ſtrangers to.—It is a vain and boyiſh eloquence; and as it has always been eſteemed below the great geniuſes of all ages, ſo much more ſo, with reſpect to thoſe writers who were actuated by the ſpirit of infinite wiſdom, and therefore wrote with that force and majeſty with which never man writ.—The other ſort of eloquence is quite the reverſe to this, and which may be ſaid to be the true characteriſtic of the holy Scriptures; where the excellence does not ariſe from a laboured and far-fetched elocution, but from a ſurpriſing mixture of ſimplicity and majeſty, which is a double character, ſo difficult to be united, that it is ſeldom to be met with in compoſitions merely human.—We ſee nothing in holy writ of affectation and ſuperfluous ornament.—As the infinite wiſe Being has condeſcended to ſtoop to our language, thereby to convey to us the light of revelation, ſo has he been pleaſed graciouſly to accommodate it to us with the moſt natural and graceful plainneſs it would admit of.—Now,

it is obſervable that the moſt excellent prophane authors, whether Greek or Latin, loſe moſt of their graces whenever we find them literally tranſlated.—Homer's famed repreſentation of Jupiter, in his firſt book;—his cried-up deſcription of a tempeſt;—his relation of Neptune's ſhaking the earth, and opening it to its centre;—his deſcription of Pallas's horſes; with numbers of other long-ſince admired paſſages,—flag, and almoſt vaniſh away, in the vulgar Latin tranſlation.

Let any one but take the pains to read the common Latin interpretation of Virgil, Theocritus, or even of Pindar, and one may venture to affirm he will be able to trace out but few remains of the graces which charmed him ſo much in the original.—The natural concluſion from hence is, that in the claſſical authors, the expreſſion, the ſweetneſs of the numbers, occaſioned by a muſical placing of words, conſtitute a great part of their beauties;—whereas, in the Sacred Writings, they conſiſt more in the

greatneſs of the things themſelves, than in the words and expreſſions.—The ideas and conceptions are ſo great and lofty in their own nature, that they neceſſarily appear magnificent in the moſt artleſs dreſs.—Look but into the Bible, and we ſee them ſhine through the moſt ſimple and literal tranſlations.—That glorious deſcription which Moſes gives of the creation of the heavens and the earth, which Longinus, the beſt critic the eaſtern world ever produced, was ſo juſtly taken with, has not loſt the leaſt whit of its intrinſic worth; and though it has undergone ſo many tranſlations, yet triumphs over all, and breaks forth with as much force and vehemence as in the original.—Of this ſtamp are numbers of paſſages throughout the Scriptures;—inſtance, that celebrated deſcription of a tempeſt in the hundred and ſeventh pſalm; thoſe beautiful reflections of holy Job, upon the ſhortneſs of life, and inſtability of human affairs, ſo judiciouſly appointed by our church in her office for the burial of

the dead;—that lively deſcription of a horſe of war, in the thirty-ninth chapter of Job, in which, from the 19th to the 26th verſe, there is ſcarce a word which does not merit a particular explication to diſplay the beauties of.—I might add to theſe, thoſe tender and pathetic expoſtulations with the children of Iſrael, which run throughout all the prophets, which the moſt uncritical reader can ſcarce help being affected with.

And now, O inhabitants of Jeruſalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard.—What could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done?—wherefore, when I expected that it ſhould bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?—and yet, ye ſay, the way of the Lord is unequal.—Hear now, O houſe of Iſrael,—is not my way equal?—are not your ways unequal?—have I any pleaſure at all that the wicked ſhould die, and not that he ſhould return from his ways and live?—I have nouriſhed and brought up children, and they have rebelled

againſt me.—The ox knows his owner, and the aſs his maſter's crib;—but Iſrael doth not know, my people doth not conſider.—There is nothing in all the eloquence of the heathen world comparable to the vivacity and tenderneſs of theſe reproaches;—there is ſomething in them ſo thoroughly affecting, and ſo noble and ſublime withal, that one might challenge the writings of the moſt celebrated orators of antiquity to produce any thing like them.—Theſe obſervations upon the ſuperiority of the inſpired penmen to heathen ones, in that which regards the compoſition more conſpicuouſly, hold good when they are conſidered upon the foot of hiſtorians.—Not to mention that prophane hiſtories give an account only of human achievements and temporal events, which, for the moſt part, are ſo full of uncertainty and contradictions, that we are at a loſs where to ſeek for truth;—but that the ſacred hiſtory is the hiſtory of GOD himſelf,—the hiſtory of his omnipotence and

infinite wiſdom, his univerſal providence, his juſtice and mercy, and all his other attributes, diſplayed under a thouſand different forms, by a ſeries of the moſt various and wonderful events that ever happened to any nation, or language:—not to inſiſt upon this viſible ſuperiority in ſacred hiſtory,—there is yet another undoubted excellence the prophane hiſtorians ſeldom arrive at, which is almoſt the diſtinguiſhing character of the ſacred ones; namely, that unaffected, artleſs manner of relating hiſtorical facts,—which is ſo intirely of a piece with every other part of the holy writings.—What I mean will be beſt made out by a few inſtances.—In the hiſtory of Joſeph (which certainly is told with the greateſt variety of beautiful and affecting circumſtances), when Joſeph makes himſelf known, and weeps aloud upon the neck of his dear brother Benjamin, that all the houſe of Pharaoh heard him; at that inſtant, none of his brethren are introduced as uttering aught, either to

expreſs their preſent joy, or palliate their former injuries to him.—On all ſides, there immediately enſues a deep and ſolemn ſilence;—a ſilence infinitely more eloquent and expreſſive, than any thing elſe could have been ſubſtituted in its place. Had Thucydides, Herodotus, Livy, or any of the celebrated claſſical hiſtorians, been employed in writing this hiſtory, when they came to this point, they would, doubtleſs, have exhauſted all their fund of eloquence in furniſhing Joſeph's brethren with laboured and ſtudied harangues; which, however fine they might have been in themſelves, would nevertheleſs have been unnatural, and altogether improper on the occaſion.—For when ſuch a variety of contrary paſſions broke in upon them, —what tongue was able to utter their hurried and diſtracted thoughts?—When remorſe, ſurpriſe, ſhame, joy, and gratitude ſtruggled together in their boſoms, how uneloquently would their lips have performed their duty?—how unfaithfully their tongues have ſpoken the language

of their hearts?—In this caſe, ſilence was truly eloquent and natural, and tears expreſſed what oratory was incapable of.

If ever theſe perſons I have been addreſſing myſelf to, can be perſuaded to follow the advice in the text, of ſearching the Scriptures,—the work of their ſalvation will be begun upon its true foundation.—For, firſt, they will inſenſibly be led to admire the beautiful propriety of their language:—when a favourable opinion is conceived of this, next, they will more cloſely attend to the goodneſs of the moral, and the purity and ſoundneſs of the doctrines.—The pleaſure of reading will ſtill be increaſed, by that near concern which they will find themſelves to have in thoſe many important truths, which they will ſee ſo clearly demonſtrated in the Bible, that grand charter of our eternal happineſs.—It is the fate of mankind, too often, to ſeem inſenſible of what they may enjoy at the eaſieſt rate.—What might not our neighbouring Romiſh countries, who groan under the yoke of

popiſh impoſitions and prieſtcraft, what might not thoſe poor miſguided creatures give, for the happineſs which we know not how to value,—of being born in a country where a church is eſtabliſhed by our laws, and encouraged by our princes;—which not only allows the free ſtudy of the Scriptures, but even exhorts and invites us to it;—a church that is a ſtranger to the tricks and artifice of having the Bible in an unknown tongue, to give the greater latitude to the deſigns of the clergy, in impoſing their own trumpery, and foiſting in whatever may beſt ſerve to aggrandize themſelves, or enſlave the wretches committed to their truſt?—In ſhort, our religion was not given us to raiſe our imaginations with ornaments of words, or ſtrokes of eloquence; but to purify our hearts, and lead us into the paths of righteouſneſs.—However, not to defend ourſelves,—when the attack is principally levelled at this point,—might give occaſion to our adverſaries to triumph, and charge us either with negligence or

inability.—It is well known how willing the enemies of our religion are to ſeek occaſions againſt us;—how ready to magnify every mote in our eyes to the bigneſs of a beam;—how eager, upon the leaſt default, to inſult and cry out, —There, there! ſo would we have it: —not, perhaps, that we are ſo much the ſubject of malice and averſion, but that the licentious age ſeems bent upon bringing chriſtianity into diſcredit at any rate; and, rather than miſs the aim, would ſtrike through the ſides of thoſe that are ſent to teach it.—Thank GOD, the truth of our holy religion is eſtabliſhed with ſuch ſtrong evidence, that it reſts upon a foundation never to be overthrown, either by the open aſſaults or cunning devices of wicked and deſigning men.—The part we have to act is to be ſteady, ſober, and vigilant; to be ready to every good work; to reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all long-ſuffering; to give occaſion of offence to no man; that, with well-doing, we may put to ſilence the ignorance of foolſh men.

I ſhall cloſe all with that excellent collect of our church:—

Bleſſed Lord, who haſt cauſed all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning, —grant that we may in ſuchwiſe hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digeſt them, that, by patience and comfort of thy holy word, we may embrace, and ever hold faſt, the bleſſed hope of everlaſting life, which thou haſt given us in thy Son, our Saviour, Jeſus Chriſt.

Now to God the Father, &c.

SERMON XLIII.

PSALM XCV. 6, 7.

O come let us worſhip and fall down before him:——
for he is the Lord our God.——

IN this pſalm we find holy David taken up with the pious contemplation of God's infinite power, majeſty, and greatneſs:—he conſiders him as the ſovereign Lord of the whole earth, the maker and ſupporter of all things;—that by him the heavens were created, and all the hoſt of them; that the earth was wiſely faſhioned by his hands;—he has founded it upon the ſeas, and eſtabliſhed it upon the floods:—that we likewiſe, the people of his paſture, were raiſed up by the ſame creating hand, from nothing, to the dignity of rational creatures, made, with reſpect to our reaſon and underſtanding, after his own moſt perfect image.

It was natural to imagine that ſuch a contemplation would light up a flame of devotion in any grateful man's breaſt; and accordingly we find it break forth in the words of the text, in a kind of religious rapture:

O come let us worſhip and fall down before him:—for he is the Lord our GOD.

Sure never exhortation to prayer and worſhip can be better enforced than upon this principle,—that GOD is the cauſe and creator of all things;—that each individual being is upheld in the ſtation it was firſt placed, by the ſame hand which firſt formed it;—that all the bleſſings and advantages, which are neceſſary to the happineſs and welfare of beings on earth, are only to be derived from the ſame fountain;—and that the only way to do it, is to ſecure an intereſt in his favour, by a grateful expreſſion of our ſenſe for the benefits we have received, and a humble dependence upon him for thoſe we expect and ſtand in want of.—Whom have we in heaven,

ſays the Pſalmiſt, but thee, O God, to look unto or depend on;—to whom ſhall we pour out our complaints, and ſpeak of all our wants and neceſſities, but to thy goodneſs, which is ever willing to confer upon us whatever becomes us to aſk, and thee to grant;—becauſe thou haſt promiſed to be nigh unto all that call upon thee,—yea, unto all ſuch as call upon thee faithfully;—that thou wilt fulfil the deſire of them that fear thee, that thou wilt alſo hear their cry, and help them.

Of all duties, prayer certainly is the ſweeteſt and moſt eaſy.—There are ſome duties which may ſeem to occaſion a troubleſome oppoſition to the natural workings of fleſh and blood;—ſuch as the forgiveneſs of injuries, and the love of our enemies;—others, which will force us unavoidably into a perpetual ſtruggle with our paſſions,—which war againſt the ſoul;—ſuch as chaſtity,—temperance,—humility.—There are other virtues, which ſeem to bid us forget our preſent intereſt for a while,—

ſuch as charity and generoſity;—others, that teach us to forget it at all times, and wholly to fix our affections on things above, and in no circumſtance to act like men that look for a continuing city here, but upon one to come, whoſe builder and maker is GOD.—But this duty of prayer and thankſgiving to GOD —has no ſuch oppoſitions to encounter; —it takes no bullock out of thy field,— no horſe out of thy ſtable,—nor he-goat out of thy fold;—it coſteth no wearineſs of bones, no untimely watchings;—it requireth no ſtrength of parts, or painful ſtudy, but juſt to know and have a true ſenſe of our dependance, and of the mercies by which we are upheld:—and with this, in every place and poſture of body, a good man may lift up his ſoul unto the Lord his GOD.

Indeed, as to the frequency of putting this duty formally in practice, as the precept muſt neceſſarily have varied according to the different ſtations in which GOD has placed us;—ſo he has been pleaſed to determine nothing preciſely

concerning it:—for, perhaps, it would be unreaſonable to expect that the day-labourer, or he that ſupports a numerous family by the ſweat of his brow, ſhould ſpend as much of his time in devotion, as the man of leiſure and unbounded wealth.—This, however, in the general, may hold good, that we are bound to pay this tribute to God, as often as his providence has put an opportunity into our hands of ſo doing;—provided that no plea, drawn from the neceſſary attentions to the affairs of the world, which many men's ſituations oblige them to, may be ſuppoſed to extend to an exemption from paying their morning and evening ſacrifice to God.——For it ſeems to be the leaſt than can be done to anſwer the demand of our duty in this point,—ſucceſſively to open and ſhut up the day in prayer and thankſgiving;—ſince there is not a morning thou riſeſt, or a night thou lieſt down, but thou art indebted for it to the watchful providence of Almighty God.——David and Daniel, whoſe names are recorded in

Scripture for future example:—the firſt, though a mighty king, embarraſſed with wars abroad, and unnatural diſturbances at home; a ſituation, one would think, would allow little time for any thing but his own and his kingdom's ſafety—yet found he leiſure to pray *ſeven times* a day:—the latter, the counſellor and firſt miniſter of ſtate to the great Nebuchadnezzar; and, though perpetually fatigued with the affairs of a mighty kingdom, and the government of the whole province of Babylon, which was committed to his adminiſtration;—though near the perſon of an idolatrous king, and amidſt the temptations of a luxurious court,——yet never neglected he is GOD; but, as we read,—he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before him.

A frequent correſpondence with heaven, by prayer and devotion, is the greateſt nouriſhment and ſupport of ſpiritual life:—it keeps the ſenſe of a GOD warm and lively within us,——which ſecures our diſpoſition, and ſets ſuch

guards over us, that hardly will a temptation prevail againſt us.——Who can entertain a baſe or an impure thought, or think of executing it, who is inceſſantly converſing with his GOD?—or not deſpiſe every temptation this lower world can offer him, when, by his conſtant addreſſes before the throne of GOD's majeſty, he brings the glorious proſpect of heaven perpetually before his eyes?

I cannot help here taking notice of the doctrine of thoſe who would reſolve all devotion into the inner man, and think that there is nothing more requiſite to expreſs our reverence to GOD, but purity and integrity of heart,——unaccompanied either with words or actions.—To this opinion it may be juſtly anſwered, that, in the preſent ſtate we are in, we find ſuch a ſtrong ſympathy and union between our ſouls and bodies, that the one cannot be touched or ſenſibly affected, without producing ſome correſponding emotion in the other.—Nature has aſſigned a different look, tone of voice, and geſture, peculiar to every

paſſion and affection we are ſubject to; and, therefore, to argue againſt this ſtrict correſpondence which is held between our ſouls and bodies,—is diſputing againſt the frame and mechaniſm of human nature.—We are not angels, but men cloathed with their bodies, and, in ſome meaſure, governed by our imaginations, that we have need of all theſe external helps which nature has made the interpreters of our thoughts.—And, no doubt, though a virtuous and a good life are more acceptable in the ſight of GOD, than either prayer or thankſgiving;—for behold, to obey is better than ſacrifice, and to hearken, than the fat of rams;—nevertheleſs, as the one ought to be done, ſo the other ought not, by any means, to be left undone.—As GOD is to be obeyed,—ſo he is to be worſhipped alſo.—For, although inward holineſs and integrity of heart is the ultimate end of the divine diſpenſations;—— yet external religion is a certain means of promoting it.——Each of them has its juſt bounds;—and there-

fore, as we would not be ſo carnal as merely to reſt contented with the one,—ſo neither can we pretend to be ſo ſpiritual as to neglect the other.

And though GOD is all-wiſe, and therefore underſtands our thoughts afar off,—and knows the exact degrees of our love and reverence to him, though we ſhould withhold thoſe outward marks of it;—yet GOD himſelf has been graciouſly pleaſed to command us to pray to him;—that we might beg the aſſiſtance of his grace to work with us againſt our own infirmities;—that we might acknowledge him to be, what he is, the ſupreme Lord of the whole world;—that we might teſtify the ſenſe we have of all his mercies and loving kindneſs to us,—and confeſs that he has the propriety of every thing we enjoy,—that the earth is the Lord's, and the fulneſs thereof.

Thus much of this duty of prayer in general.—From every individual it may be reaſonable expected, from a bare reflection upon his own ſtation, his perſonal wants, and the daily bleſſings which he has received in particular;—

but, for thoſe bleſſings beſtowed upon the whole ſpecies in common,—reaſon ſeems further to require, that a joint return ſhould be made by as many of the ſpecies as can conveniently aſſemble together for this religious purpoſe.—From hence ariſes, likewiſe, the reaſonableneſs of public worſhip, and ſacred places ſet apart for that purpoſe; without which, it would be very difficult to preſerve that ſenſe of GOD and religion upon the minds of men, which is ſo neceſſary to their well-being, conſidered only as a civil ſociety, and with regard to the purpoſes of this life, and the influence which a juſt ſenſe of it muſt have upon their actions.—Beſides, men who are united in ſocieties, can have no other cement to unite them likewiſe in religious ties, as well as in manners of worſhip and points of faith, but the inſtitution of ſolemn times and public places deſtined for that uſe.

And it is not to be queſtioned, that if the time, as well as place, for ſerving GOD, were once conſidered as indifferent, and left ſo far to every man's choice

as to have no calls to public prayer, however a ſenſe of religion might be preſerved a while by a few ſpeculative men, yet that the bulk of mankind would loſe all knowledge of it, and in time live without GOD in the world.—Not that private prayer is the leſs our duty, the contrary of which is proved above; and our Saviour ſays, that when we pray to GOD in ſecret, we ſhall be rewarded openly;—but that prayers which are publicly offered up in GOD's houſe, tend more to the glory of GOD, and the benefit of ourſelves:——for this reaſon, that they are preſumed to be performed with greater attention and ſerioufneſs, and therefore moſt likely to be heard with a more favourable acceptance. —And for this, one might appeal to every man's breaſt, whether he has not been affected with the moſt elevated pitch of devotion, when he gave thanks in the great congregation of the ſaints, and praiſed GOD amongſt much people? ——Of this united worſhip there is a glorious deſcription which St. John

gives us, in the Revelations, where he ſuppoſes the whoſe univerſe joining together, in their ſeveral capacities, to give glory in this manner to their common Lord.—Every creature which was in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and ſuch as were in the ſeas, and all that were in them, heard I, crying,—Bleſſing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that ſitteth upon the throne.

But here it may be aſked, that if public worſhip tends ſo much to promote the glory of God,—and is what is ſo indiſpenſably the duty and benefit of every chriſtian ſtate,——how came it to paſs, that our bleſſed Saviour left no command to his followers, throughout the goſpel, to ſet up public places of worſhip, and keep them ſacred for that purpoſe?——It may be anſwered,—that the neceſſity of ſetting apart places for divine worſhip, and the holineſs of them when thus ſet apart, ſeemed already to have been ſo well eſtabliſhed by former revelation, as not to need any expreſs

precept upon that ſubject:—for though the particular appointment of the temple, and the confinement of worſhip to that place alone, were only temporary parts of the Jewiſh covenant; yet the neceſſity and duty of having places ſomewhere ſolemnly dedicated to GOD carried a moral reaſon with it, and therefore was not aboliſhed with the ceremonial part of the law.—Our Saviour came not to deſtroy, but to fulfil the law;—and therefore the moral precepts of it, which promoted a due regard to the divine Majeſty, remained in as full force as ever.—And accordingly we find it atteſted, both by chriſtian and heathen writers, that ſo ſoon as the ſecond century, when the number of believers was much increaſed, and the circumſtances of rich converts enabled them to do it, —that they began to erect edifices for divine worſhip;—and though, under the frowns and oppreſſion of the civil power, they every Sabbath aſſembled themſelves therein, that with one hand and one lip they might declare whoſe they were, and

whom they ſerved, and, as the ſervants of one Lord, might offer up their joint prayers and petitions.

I wiſh there was no reaſon to lament an abatement of this religious zeal amongſt chriſtians of later days.—Though the piety of our forefathers ſeems, in a great meaſure, to have deprived us of the merit of building churches for the ſervice of GOD, there can be no ſuch plea for not frequenting them in a regular and ſolemn manner.—How often do people abſent themſelves (when in the utmoſt diſtreſs how to diſpoſe of themſelves) from church, even upon thoſe days which are ſet apart for nothing elſe but the worſhip of GOD;—when, to trifle that day away, or apply any portion of it to ſecular concerns, is a ſacrilege almoſt in the literal ſenſe of the word.

From this duty of public prayer ariſes another, which I cannot help ſpeaking of, it being ſo dependent upon it;—I mean a ſerious, devout, and reſpectful behaviour, when we are performing this

ſolemn duty in the houſe of GOD.—This is ſurely the leaſt that can be neceſſary in the immediate preſence of the Sovereign of the world, upon whoſe acceptance of our addreſſes all our preſent and future happineſs depends.

External behaviour is the reſult of inward reverence, and is therefore part of our duty to GOD, whom we are to worſhip in body as well as ſpirit.

And as no one ſhould be wanting in outward reſpect and decorum before an earthly prince or ſuperior, much leſs ſhould we be ſo before him, whom the heaven of heavens cannot contain.

Notwithſtanding the obviouſneſs of this branch of duty,—it ſeems often to be little underſtood;—and whoever will take a general ſurvey of church behaviour, will often meet with ſcenes of ſad variety.—What a vein of indolence and indevotion ſometimes ſeems to run throughout whole congregations!—what ill-timed pains do ſome take in putting on an air of gaiety and indifference in the moſt intereſting parts of this duty,

—even when they are making confeſſion of their ſins, as if they were aſhamed to be thought ſerious with their GOD! —Surely, to addreſs ourſelves to his infinite Majeſty after a negligent and diſpaſſionate manner, beſides the immediate indignity offered, it is a ſad ſign we little conſider the bleſſings we aſk for, and far leſs deſerve them. — Beſides, what is a prayer, unleſs our heart and affections go along with it?—It is not ſo much as the ſhadow of devotion: and little better than the papiſts telling their beads,—or honouring GOD with their lips, when their hearts are far from him. — The conſideration that a perſon is come to proſtrate himſelf before the throne of high heaven, and in that place which is particularly diſtinguiſhed by his preſence, is ſufficient inducement for any one to watch over his imagination, and guard againſt the leaſt appearance of levity and diſreſpect.

An inward ſincerity will of courſe influence the outward deportment; but

where the one is wanting, there is great reaſon to ſuſpect the abſence of the other.—I own it is poſſible, and often happens, that this external garb of religion may be worn, when there is little within of a piece with it;—but I believe the converſe of the propoſition can never happen to be true, that a truly religious frame of mind ſhould exiſt without ſome outward mark of it.—The mind will ſhine through the veil of fleſh which covers it, and naturally expreſs its religious diſpoſitions;—and, if it poſſeſſes the power of godlineſs,—will have the external form of it too.

May GOD grant us to be defective in neither,—but that we may ſo praiſe and magnify GOD on earth,—that when he cometh, at the laſt day, with ten thouſand of his ſaints in heaven, to judge the world, we may be partakers of their eternal inheritance. Amen.

SERMON XLIV.

The Ways of Providence juſtified, to Man.

PSALM LXXIII. 12, 13.

Behold theſe are the ungodly who proſper in the world, they increaſe in riches.

Verily I have cleanſed my heart in vain, and waſhed my hands in innocency.

THIS complaint of the Pſalmiſt's concerning the promiſcuous diſtribution of GOD's bleſſings to the juſt and unjuſt,—that the ſun ſhould ſhine without diſtinction upon the good and the bad,—and rains deſcend upon the righteous and unrighteous man,—is a ſubject that has afforded much matter for inquiry, and at one time or other has raiſed doubts to diſhearten and perplex the minds of men. If the ſovereign Lord of all the earth does look on, whence ſo much diſorder in the face of

things?—why is it permitted, that wiſe and good men ſhould be left often a prey to ſo many miſeries and diſtreſſes of life,—whilſt the guilty and fooliſh triumph in their offences, and even the tabernacles of robbers proſper?

To this it is anſwered,—that therefore there is a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments to take place after this life, wherein all theſe inequalities ſhall be made even, where the circumſtances of every man's caſe ſhall be conſidered, and where GOD ſhall be juſtified in all his ways, and every mouth ſhall be ſtopt.

If this was not ſo,—if the ungodly were to proſper in the world, and have riches in poſſeſſion,—and no diſtinction to be made hereafter,—to what purpoſe would it have been to have maintained our integrity?—Lo! then, indeed, ſhould I have cleanſed my heart in vain, and waſhed my hands in innocency.

It is farther ſaid, and what is a more direct anſwer to the point,——that when GOD created man, that he might make

him capable of receiving happineſs at his hands hereafter,—he endowed him with liberty and freedom of choice, without which he could not have been a creature accountable for his actions; —that it is merely from the bad uſe he makes of theſe gifts,—that all thoſe inſtances of irregularity do reſult, upon which the complaint is here grounded, —which could no ways be prevented, but by the total ſubverſion of human liberty;—that ſhould GOD make bare his arm, and interpoſe in every injuſtice that is committed,—mankind might be ſaid to do what was right,—but, at the ſame time, to loſe the merit of it, ſince they would act under force and neceſſity, and not from the determinations of their own mind;—that, upon this ſuppoſition,—a man could with no more reaſon expect to go to heaven for acts of temperance, juſtice, and humanity, than for the ordinary impulſes of hunger and thirſt, which nature directed —that GOD has dealt with man upon

better terms;—he has firſt endowed him with liberty and free-will;——he has ſet life and death, good and evil, before him;—that he has given him faculties to find out what will be the conſequences of either way of acting, and then left him to take which courſe his reaſon and direction ſhall point out.

I ſhall deſiſt from enlarging any further upon either of the foregoing arguments in vindication of GOD's providence, which are urged ſo often with ſo much force and conviction, as to leave no room for a reaſonable reply;—ſince the miſeries which befal the good, and the ſeeming happineſs of the wicked, could not be otherwiſe in ſuch a free ſtate and condition as this in which we are placed.

In all charges of this kind, we generally take two things for granted;—1ſt, That in the inſtances we give, we know certainly the good from the bad;—— and, 2dly, The reſpective ſtate of their enjoyments or ſufferings.

I ſhall therefore, in the remaining part of my diſcourſe, take up your time with a ſhort inquiry into the difficulties of coming not only at the true characters of men,——but likewiſe of knowing either the degrees of their real happineſs or miſery in this life.

The firſt of theſe will teach us candour in our judgment of others;—the ſecond, to which I ſhall confine myſelf, will teach us humility in our reaſonings upon the ways of GOD.

For though the miſeries of the good, and the proſperity of the wicked, are not in general to be denied;—yet I ſhall endeavour to ſhew, that the particular inſtances we are apt to produce, when we cry out in the words of the Pſalmiſt, Lo! theſe are the ungodly,—theſe proſper, and are happy in the world;—I ſay, I ſhall endeavour to ſhew, that we are ſo ignorant of the articles of the charge,—and the evidence we go upon to make them good is ſo lame and defective,—as to be ſufficient by itſelf to check all propenſity to expoſtulate with

God's providence, allowing there was no other way of clearing up the matter reconcileably to his attributes.

And, firſt,—what certain and infallible marks have we of the goodneſs or badneſs of the bulk of mankind?

If we truſt to fame and reports,—if they are good, how do we know but they may proceed from partial friendſhip or flattery?—when bad, from envy or malice, from ill-natured ſurmiſes and conſtructions of things?—and, on both ſides, from ſmall matters aggrandized through miſtake,—and ſometimes through the unſkilful relation of even truth itſelf?—From ſome, or all of which cauſes, it happens, that the characters of men, like the hiſtories of the Egyptians, are to be received and read with caution;—they are generally dreſſed out and diſfigured with ſo many dreams and fables, that every ordinary reader ſhall not be able to diſtinguiſh truth from falſehood.—But allowing theſe reflections to be too ſevere in this matter,—that no ſuch thing as envy ever leſſened

a man's character, or malice blackened it;—yet the characters of men are not eaſily penetrated, as they depend often upon the retired, unſeen parts of a man's life.—The beſt and trueſt piety is moſt ſecret, and the worſt of actions, for different reaſons, will be ſo too.—Some men are modeſt, and ſeem to take pains to hide their virtues; and, from a natural diſtance and reſerve in their tempers, ſcarce ſuffer their good qualities to be known:—others, on the contrary, put in practice a thouſand little arts to counterfeit virtues which they have not,—the better to conceal thoſe vices which they really have;—and this under fair ſhows of ſanctity, good-nature, generoſity, or ſome virtue or other,—too ſpecious to be ſeen through,—too amiable and diſintereſted to be ſuſpected.—Theſe hints may be ſufficient to ſhow how hard it is to come at the matter of fact:—but one may go a ſtep further,—and ſay, that even that, in many caſes, could we come to the knowledge of it, is not ſufficient by itſelf to pronounce a man either good or bad.—There are num-

bers of circumſtances which attend every action of a man's life, which can never come to the knowledge of the world,—yet ought to be known, and well weighed, before ſentence with any juſtice can be paſſed upon him.—A man may have different views and a different ſenſe of things from what his judges have; and what he underſtands and feels, and what paſſes within him, may be a ſecret treaſured up deeply there for ever.—A man, through bodily infirmity, or ſome complexional defect, which perhaps is not in his power to correct,—may be ſubject to inadvertencies,—to ſtarts—and unhappy turns of temper; he may lay open to ſnares he is not always aware of, or, through ignorance and want of information and proper helps, he may labour in the dark:—in all which caſes he may do many things which are wrong in themſelves, and yet be innocent;—at leaſt an object rather to be pitied than cenſured with ſeverity and ill-will.—Theſe are difficulties which ſtand in every one's

way in the forming a judgment of the characters of others.—But, for once, let us ſuppoſe them all to be got over, ſo that we could ſee the bottom of every man's heart;—let us allow that the word rogue or honeſt man, was wrote ſo legibly in every man's face, that no one could poſſibly miſtake it;—yet ſtill the happineſs of both the one and the other, which is the only fact that can bring the charge home, is what we have ſo little certain knowledge of, —that, bating ſome flagrant inſtances, ——whenever we venture to pronounce upon it, our deciſions are little more than random gueſſes.——For who can ſearch the heart of man?——it is treacherous even to ourſelves, and much more likely to impoſe upon others.—Even in laughter (if you will believe Solomon) the heart is ſorrowful: ——*the mind ſits drooping, whilſt the countenance is gay*:—and even he, who is the object of envy to thoſe who look no further than the ſurface of his eſtate, —may appear at the ſame time worthy

of compaſſion to thoſe who know his private receſſes.—Beſides this, a man's unhappineſs is not to be aſcertained ſo much from what is known to have befallen him,——as from his particular turn and caſt of mind, and capacity of bearing it. —— Poverty, exile, loſs of fame or friends, the death of children, the deareſt of all pledges of a man's happineſs, make not equal impreſſions upon every temper.—You will ſee one man undergo, with ſcarce the expence of a ſigh,—what another, in the bitterneſs of his ſoul, would go mourning for all his life long:—nay, a haſty word, or an unkind look, to a ſoft and tender nature, will ſtrike deeper than a ſword to the hardened and ſenſeleſs.—If theſe reflections hold true with regard to misfortunes,—they are the ſame with regard to enjoyments:—we are formed differently,—have different taſtes and perceptions of things;—by the force of habit, education, or a particular caſt of mind,—it happens that neither the uſe or poſſeſſion of the ſame enjoyments and ad-

vantages, produce the ſame happineſs and contentment;—but that it differs in every man almoſt according to his temper and complexion:—ſo that the ſelf-ſame happy accidents in life, which ſhall give raptures to the choleric or ſanguine man, ſhall be received with indifference by the cold and phlegmatic;—and ſo oddly perplexed are the accounts of both human happineſs and miſery in this world,—that trifles, light as air, ſhall be able to make the hearts of ſome men ſing for joy;—at the ſame time that others, with real bleſſings and advantages, without the power of uſing them, have their hearts heavy and diſcontented.

Alas! if the principles of contentment are not within us,—the height of ſtation and worldly grandeur will as ſoon add a cubit to a man's ſtature as to his happineſs.

This will ſuggeſt to us how little a way we have gone towards the proof of any man's happineſs,——in barely ſaying,——Lo! this man proſpers in the

world,—and this man has riches in poſſeſſion.

When a man has got much above us, we take it for granted,—that he ſees ſome glorious proſpects, and feels ſome mighty pleaſures from his height;—whereas, could we get up to him, it is great odds whether we ſhould find any thing to make us tolerable amends for the pains and trouble of climbing up ſo high.—Nothing, perhaps, but more dangers and more troubles ſtill;—and ſuch a giddineſs of head beſides, as to make a wiſe man wiſh he was well down again upon the level.—To calculate, therefore, the happineſs of mankind by their ſtations and honours, is the moſt deceitful of all rules;———great, no doubt, is the happineſs which a moderate fortune, and moderate deſires, with a conſciouſneſs of virtue, will ſecure a man.—Many are the ſilent pleaſures of the honeſt peaſant, who riſes cheerfully to his labour:—look into his dwelling,——where the ſcene of every man's happineſs chiefly lies;—he has the ſame

domeſtic endearments,—as much joy and comfort in his children,—and as flattering hopes of their doing well,—to enliven his hours and glad his heart, as you could conceive in the moſt affluent ſtation.—And I make no doubt, in general, but if the true account of his joys and ſufferings were to be balanced with thoſe of his betters,—that the upſhot would prove to be little more than this, —that the rich man had the more meat, —but the poor man the better ſtomach; —the one had more luxury,—more able phyſicians to attend and ſet him to rights; —the other, more health and ſoundneſs in his bones, and leſs occaſion for their help; that, after theſe two articles betwixt them were balanced,—in all other things they ſtood upon a level:—that the ſun ſhines as warm,—the air blows as freſh, and the earth breathes as fragrant, upon the one as the other;—and that they have an equal ſhare in all the beauties and real benefits of nature.—Theſe hints may be ſufficient to ſhew what I propoſed from them,—the difficulties

which attend us in judging truly either of the happineſs or the miſery of the bulk of mankind,—the evidence being ſtill more defective in this caſe (as the matter of fact is hard to come at)—than even in that of judging of their true characters; of both which, in general, we have ſuch imperfect knowledge, as will teach us candour in our determinations upon each other.

But the main purport of this diſcourſe, is, to teach us humility in our reaſonings upon the ways of the Almighty.

That things are dealt unequally in this world, is one of the ſtrongeſt natural arguments for a future ſtate,—and therefore is not to be overthrown: nevertheleſs,—I am perſuaded the charge is far from being as great as at firſt ſight it may appear;—or if it is,—that our views of things are ſo narrow and confined, that it is not in our power to make it good.

But ſuppoſe it otherwiſe,—that the happineſs and proſperity of bad men

were as great as our general complaints make them,—and, what is not the caſe, —that we were not able to clear up the matter, or anſwer it reconcileably with GOD's juſtice and providence, — what ſhall we infer?—Why, the moſt becoming concluſion is,——that it is one inſtance more, out of many others, of our ignorance:—why ſhould this, or any other religious difficulty he cannot comprehend,—why ſhould it alarm him more than ten thouſand other difficulties which every day elude his moſt exact and attentive ſearch?—Does not the meaneſt flower in the field, or the ſmalleſt blade of graſs, baffle the underſtanding of the moſt penetrating mind?—Can the deepeſt inquiries after nature tell us, upon what particular ſize and motion of parts the various colours and taſtes of vegetables depend;—why one ſhrub is laxative,—another aſtringent;—why arſenic or hellebore ſhould lay waſte this noble frame of ours,—or opium lock up all the inroads to our ſenſes, and plunder us, in ſo mercileſs a manner, of reaſon

and underſtanding?—Nay, have not the moſt obvious things, that come in our way, dark ſides, which the quickeſt ſight cannot penetrate into; and do not the cleareſt and moſt exalted underſtandings find themſelves puzzled, and at a loſs, in every particle of matter?

Go then,—proud man!—and when thy head turns giddy with opinions of thy own wiſdom, that thou wouldſt correct the meaſures of the Almighty,—go then,—take a full view of thyſelf in this glaſs;—conſider thy own faculties, how narrow and imperfect;—how much they are chequered with truth and falſehoood;—how little arrives at thy knowledge, and how darkly and confuſedly thou diſcerneſt even that little as in a glaſs:—conſider the beginnings and endings of things, the greateſt and the ſmalleſt, how they all conſpire to baffle thee;——and which way ever thou proſecuteſt thy enquiries,——what freſh ſubjects of amazement,—and what freſh reaſons to believe there are more yet behind which thou canſt never compre-

hend.—Conſider,—theſe are but part of his ways;—how little a portion is heard of him?—Canſt thou, by ſearching, find out GOD?—wouldſt thou know the Almighty to perfection?—'Tis as high as heaven, what canſt thou do?—'tis deeper than hell, how canſt thou know it?

Could we but ſee the myſterious workings of Providence, and were we able to comprehend the whole plan of his infinite wiſdom and goodneſs, which poſſibly may be the caſe in the final conſummation of all things;—thoſe events, which we are now ſo perplexed to account for, would probably exalt and magnify his wiſdom, and make us cry out with the Apoſtle, in that rapturous exclamation,—O! the depth of the riches both of the goodneſs and wiſdom of GOD! —how unſearchable are his ways, and his paths paſt finding out!

NOW to GOD, &c.

SERMON XLV.

The Ingratitude of Iſrael.

2 KINGS, XVII. 7.

For ſo it was,—that the children of Iſrael had ſinned againſt the Lord their GOD, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt.—

THE words of the text account for the cauſe of a ſad calamity, which is related, in the foregoing verſes, to have befallen a great number of Iſraelites, who were ſurpriſed in the capital city of Samaria, by Hoſea king of Aſſyria, and cruelly carried away by him out of their own country, and placed on the deſolate frontiers of Halah, and in Haber, by the river Gozan, and in the city of the Medes, and there confined to end their days in ſorrow and captivity. —Upon which the ſacred hiſtorian, inſtead of accounting for ſo ſad an event

merely from political ſprings and cauſes; ſuch, for inſtance, as the ſuperior ſtrength and policy of the enemy, or an unſeaſonable provocation given,—or that proper meaſures of defence were neglected; —he traces it up, in one word, to its true cauſe:—For ſo it was, ſays he, that the children of Iſrael had ſinned againſt the Lord their GOD, who had brought them up out of the land of Egypt.—It was ſurely a ſufficient foundation to dread ſome evil,—that they had ſinned againſt that Being who had an unqueſtionable right to their obedience.—But what an aggravation was it—that they had not only ſinned ſimply againſt the truth, but againſt the GOD of mercies,—who had brought them forth out of the land of Egypt;—who not only created, upheld, and favoured them with ſo many advantages in common with the reſt of their fellow-creatures,—but who had been particularly kind to them in their misfortunes;—who, when they were in the houſe of bondage, in the moſt hopeleſs condition, without a pro-

ſpect of any natural means of redreſs, had compaſſionately heard their cry, and took pity upon the afflictions of a diſtreſſed people,—and, by a chain of miracles, delivered them from ſervitude and oppreſſion:—miracles of ſo ſtupendous a nature, that I take delight to offer them, as often as I have an opportunity, to your devouteſt contemplations. —This, you would think as high and as complicated an aggravation of their ſins as could be urged.—This was not all; —for beſides GOD's goodneſs in firſt favouring their miraculous eſcape, a ſeries of ſucceſſes not to be accounted for from ſecond cauſes, and the natural courſe of events, had crowned their heads in ſo remarkable a manner, as to afford an evident proof, not only of his general concern for their welfare, but of his particular providence and attachment to them above all people upon earth.—In the wilderneſs he led them like ſheep, and kept them as the apple of his eye:—he ſuffered no man to do them wrong, but reproved even kings

for their ſake.——When they entered into the promiſed land,—no force was able to ſtand before them;—when in poſſeſſion of it,—no army was able to drive them out;—and, in a word, nature, for a time, was driven backwards to ſerve them, and even the Sun itſelf had ſtood ſtill in the midſt of heaven to ſecure their victories.

A people with ſo many teſtimonies of God's favour, who had not profited thereby, ſo as to become a virtuous people, muſt have been utterly corrupt;—and ſo they were.——And it is likely from the many ſpecimens they had given, in Moſes's time, of a diſpoſition to forget God's benefits, and upon every trial to rebel againſt him,—he foreſaw they would certainly prove a thankleſs and unthinking people, extremely inclined to go aſtray and do evil;—and therefore, if any thing was likely to bring them back to themſelves, and to conſider the evils of their miſdoings, ——it muſt be the dread of ſome temporal calamity, which, he prophetically

threatened, would one day or other befal them:—hoping, no doubt,—that if no principle of gratitude could make them an obedient people,——at leaſt they might be wrought upon by the terror of being reduced back again by the ſame all-powerful hand to their firſt diſtreſſed condition;——which, in the end, did actually overtake them.——For, at length, when neither the alternatives of promiſes or threatenings,—when neither rewards or corrections,——comforts or afflictions, could ſoften them;——when continual inſtructions,—warnings,—invitations;—reproofs,—miracles,——prophets and holy guides, had no effect, but, inſtead of making them grow better, apparently made them grow worſe,——God's patience at length withdrew,—and he ſuffered them to reap the wages of their folly, by letting them fall into the ſtate of bondage from whence he had firſt raiſed them;—and that not only in that partial inſtance of thoſe in Samaria, who were taken by Hoſea,—but, I mean, in that more general inſtance of

their overthrow by the army of the Chaldeans; — wherein he ſuffered the whole nation to be led away, and carried captive into Nineveh and Babylon. —We may be aſſured, that the hiſtory of God Almighty's juſt dealings with this froward and thoughtleſs people—— was not wrote for nothing;—but that it was given as a loud call and warning of obedience and gratitude, for all races of men to whom the light of revelation ſhould hereafter reach;——and therefore I have made choice of this ſubject, as it ſeems likely to furniſh ſome reflections ſeaſonable for the beginning of this week,—which ſhould be devoted to ſuch meditations as may prepare and fit us for the ſolemn faſt which we are ſhortly to obſerve, and whoſe pious intention will not be anſwered by a bare aſſembling ourſelves together, without making ſome religious and national remarks ſuitable to the occaſion.—Doubtleſs, there is no nation which ever had ſo many extraordinary reaſons and ſupernatural motives to become thankful and virtuous as the

Jews had;—which, beſides the daily bleſſings of GOD's providence to them, has not received ſufficient bleſſings and mercies at the hand of GOD, ſo as to engage their beſt ſervices, and the warmeſt returns of gratitude they can pay.

There has been a time, may be, when they have been delivered from ſome grievous calamity,—from the rage of peſtilence or famine—from the edge and fury of the ſword,—from the fate and fall of kingdoms round them:—they may have been preſerved by providential diſcoveries of plots and deſigns againſt the well-being of their ſtates, or by critical turns and revolutions in their favour, when beginning to ſink.—By ſome ſignal interpoſition of GOD's providence, they may have reſcued their liberties, and all that was dear to them, from the jaws of ſome tyrant;—or may have preſerved their religion pure and uncorrupted, when all other comforts failed them.—If other countries have reaſon to be thankful to GOD for any one of theſe mercies,—much more has this of ours,—which, at one time or

other, has received them all;—inſomuch that our hiſtory, for this laſt hundred years, has ſcarce been any thing but the hiſtory of our deliverances and God's bleſſings;—and theſe in ſo complicated a chain, ſuch as were ſcarce ever vouchſafed to any people beſides, except the Jews;—and with regard to them, though inferior in the ſtupendous manner, of their working,—yet no way ſo—in the extenſive goodneſs of their effects, and the infinite benevolence and power which muſt have wrought them for us.

Here then let us ſtop to look back a moment, and inquire what great effects all this has had upon our ſins, and how far worthy we have lived of what we have received.

A ſtranger, when he heard that this iſland had been ſo favoured by heaven,—ſo happy in our laws and religion,—ſo flouriſhing in our trade,—and ſo bleſſed in our ſituation,—and ſo viſibly protected in all of them by providence,—— would conclude, that our morals had kept pace with theſe bleſſings, and

would expect that, as we were the moſt favoured by God Almighty, we muſt be the moſt virtuous and religious people upon earth.

Would to God, there was any other reaſon to incline one to ſuch a belief!—would to God, that the appearance of religion was more frequent! for that would neceſſarily imply the reality of it ſomewhere, and moſt probably in the greateſt and moſt reſpectable characters of the nation.—Such was the ſituation of this country, till a licentious king introduced a licentious age.—The court of Charles the Second firſt brake in upon, and, I fear, has almoſt demoliſhed the out-works of religion, of modeſty, and of ſober manners,—ſo that, inſtead of any real marks of religion amongſt us, you ſee thouſands who are tired with carrying the maſk of it,—and have thrown it aſide as a uſeleſs incumbrance.

But this licentiouſneſs, he'll ſay, may be chiefly owing to a long courſe of proſperity, which is apt to corrupt men's minds.—God has ſince tried you with afflictions; — you have had lately a

bloody and expenſive war;—God has ſent, moreover, a peſtilence amongſt your cattle, which has cut off the ſtock from the fold, and left no herd in the ſtalls:—beſides,—you have juſt felt two dreadful ſhocks in your metropolis of a moſt terrifying nature;——which, if God's providence had not checked and reſtrained within ſome bounds, might have overthrown your capital, and your kingdom with it.

Surely, he'll ſay,—all theſe warnings muſt have awakened the conſciences of the moſt unthinking part of you, and forced the inhabitants of your land, from ſuch admonitions, to have learned righteouſneſs.—I own, this is the natural effect, and, one ſhould hope, ſhould always be the improvement from ſuch calamities;—for we often find, that numbers of people, who in their proſperity ſeemed to forget God—do yet remember him in the days of trouble and diſtreſs;—yet, conſider this nationally,—we ſee no ſuch effect from it, as, in fact, one would expect from ſpeculation.

For inſtance, with all the devaſtation and bloodſhed which the war has occaſioned,—how many converts has it made either to virtue or frugality?—The peſtilence amongſt our cattle, though it has diſtreſſed, and utterly undone, ſo many thouſands; yet what one viſible alteration has it made in the courſe of our lives?

And though, one would imagine, that the neceſſary drains of taxes for the one, and the loſs of rent and property from the other,—ſhould, in ſome meaſure, have withdrawn the means of gratifying our paſſions as we have done;—yet what appearance is there amongſt us that it is ſo;—what one faſhionable folly or extravagance has been checked?—Are not the ſame expences of equipage, and furniture, and dreſs,—the ſame order of diverſions, perpetually returning, and as great luxury and epicuriſm of entertainments, as in the moſt proſperous condition?—So that, though the head is ſick, and the whole heart is faint, we all affect to look well in the face, either as if nothing had happened, or we were

aſhamed to acknowledge the force and natural effects of the chaſtiſements of GOD.—And if, from the effects which war and peſtilence have had,—we may form a judgment of the moral effects which this laſt terror is likely to produce,—it is to be feared, however we might be ſtartled at firſt,—that the impreſſions will ſcarce laſt longer than the inſtantaneous ſhock which occaſioned them:—And I make no doubt,—ſhould a man have courage to declare his opinion,—"That he believed it was an indication of GOD's anger upon a corrupt generation,"—that it would be great odds but he would be pitied for his weakneſs, or openly laughed at for his ſuperſtition.—Or if, after ſuch a declaration,—he was thought worth ſetting right in his miſtakes,—he would be informed,—that religion had nothing to do in explications of this kind;—that all ſuch violent vibrations of the earth were owing to ſubterraneous caverns falling down of themſelves, or being blown up by nitrous and ſulphureous vapours rarified by heat;—and that it was idle

to bring in the Deity to untie the knot, when it can be reſolved eaſily into natural cauſes.—Vain unthinking mortals! —As if natural cauſes were any thing elſe in the hands of GOD,—but inſtruments which he can turn to work the purpoſes of his will, either to reward or puniſh, as ſeems fitting to his infinite wiſdom.

Thus no man repenteth him of his wickedneſs, ſaying,—What have I done? —but every one turneth to his courſe, as a horſe ruſheth into the battle.—To conclude, however we may under-rate it now,—it is a maxim of eternal truth, —which both reaſonings and all accounts from hiſtory confirm,—that the wickedneſs and corruption of a people will ſooner or later always bring on temporal miſchiefs and calamities—And can it be otherwiſe?—for a vicious nation not only carries the ſeeds of deſtruction within, from the natural workings and courſe of things,—but it lays itſelf open to the whole force and injury of accidents from without;—and I do venture to ſay,—there never was a

nation or people fallen into troubles or decay,—but one might juſtly leave the ſame remark upon them which the ſacred hiſtorian makes in the text upon the misfortunes of the Iſraelites,—for ſo it was,—that they had ſinned againſt the Lord their God.

Let us, therefore, conſtantly bear in mind that concluſion of the ſacred writer,—which I ſhall give you in his own beautiful and awful language:

"But the Lord, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt, with great power and a ſtretch'd-out arm, him ſhall ye fear, and him ſhall ye worſhip,—and to him ſhall ye do ſacrifice:—And the ſtatutes, and the ordinances, and the commandments he wrote for you, ye ſhall obſerve to do for evermore.—The Lord your God ye ſhall fear,—and he ſhall deliver you out of the hand of all your enemies."

Now to God the Father, &c.

END OF THE EIGHTH VOLUME.

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